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RAIN  
UPON GODSHILL



# BY J. B. PRIESTLEY

## FICTION

THE DOOMSDAY MEN  
THEY WALK IN THE CITY  
FARAWAY  
ANGEL PAVEMENT

THE GOOD COMPANIONS  
WONDER HERO  
BENIGHTED  
ADAM IN MOONSHINE

## PLAYS

JOHNSON OVER JORDAN  
WHEN WE ARE MARRIED  
BEES ON THE BOAT DECK  
DUET IN FLOODLIGHT  
CORNELIUS

EDEN END  
DANGEROUS CORNER  
LABURNUM GROVE  
THE ROUNDABOUT

## MISCELLANEOUS

RAIN UPON GODSHILL  
MIDNIGHT ON THE DESERT  
ENGLISH JOURNEY  
FOUR-IN-HAND  
I FOR ONE  
TALKING AN ESSAY  
OPEN HOUSE  
APES AND ANGELS

SELF SELECTED ESSAYS  
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# RAIN UPON GODSHILL

*A Further Chapter of Autobiography*

BY

J. B. PRIESTLEY



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# I

THIS, I TELL MYSELF ALL OVER AGAIN, IS THE BEST workroom I have ever had, and probably the best I shall ever have. We built it on the flat roof of this old Isle of Wight manor house, which had no study for me. It is a good job; sensible, well designed, rather severe (as a workroom should be), and modern, without looking like an idiotic cocktail bar. It has five big windows in a row; the three in the centre, about four feet square, wind up and down like the windows in a motor-car; and then at each end is an equally large curved one; so that the general effect, as everybody notices, is of the bridge of a ship. (And don't forget it is on the roof.) Once up here, I feel that the family ship happens to be at anchor in the middle of the Isle of Wight, but that at any moment I can give the signal and off we shall go. In between spells of work at the table, I can pace up and down, and there is so much light and air that I don't feel, as one does in a study tucked away at the back of the ground floor, that I am a prisoner of my work. I can see more up here, with the immensely wide view sweeping across a quarter of the island, than if I stopped working and went down into the garden. In high summer the mornings are hot in this study.

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

and I have worked here at ease in the cotton shirt and trousers made for me by a Chinese in Tahiti. When I was younger, warm weather put me off my work. I could not both sweat and think. I remember doing a tripos at Cambridge during a blazing heat-wave, and I felt incapable of thought and the very pen was a burden. But now that I have climbed the central peak of man's years and am on the darker and colder slope, I welcome the sun and feel more lively in mind and more creative when he is about. Perhaps that is what is wrong this morning. It is not the unfamiliarity of this study, after more than seven months absence from it, that is keeping me from work, but the sunless and chilling weather.

All my five big windows show me the same sullen morning. Not a glimmer of the sun. All the high downs are lost in mist; the fields look sodden; and away over on the left, behind the tall elms, there are fine curtains of rain sweeping down upon Godshill. The calendar says it is Spring. Along the drive the daffodil and narcissus and white violet have returned, and the banks of the little ditch by the tennis court are fat with primroses. Coming here I saw almond and cherry blossom, as if somebody had been nailing up vast Japanese prints along the road. Spring is about somewhere, but this morning Winter is putting down its last barrage, covering its retreat. The elms, though noisy with rooks, are still bare. Looking out again, I see even less than I did a few minutes

ago. The sea might have crept in another league during the night and now be within a mile of us, for all I can tell to the contrary. A cow bellows mournfully from the neighbouring farm, which always seems to have more than its share of these bovine tragedy queens. A blackbird is trying over its new season's numbers somewhere in the garden. The rain, having by this time probably drowned Godshill, creeps nearer. This would not be a bad morning for early February, but now, in April, it is detestable. If I stand looking out of the windows, skipper of the landship, it is unpleasantly cold, and there is nothing for it but to come away, to draw nearer the fire.

There was half a North London preparatory school, twenty-four children and their teachers, in this house from September until Christmas, but if they ever came up to this study I can see no signs of their occupation. The books seem to be as I left them, and now stand to attention like a forgotten brigade suddenly visited by the supreme command. They have that faintly silly look, like the solemn little notes we made a year or two ago. If this had been somebody else's house and these were somebody else's books, I would be spending all day rummaging through the shelves, tasting here and there, and then be staying up half the night reading somebody else's favourite nonsense. When I am away from home, I waste much of my time, whole

bright mornings, golden afternoons, reading the stupidest stuff, second-rate detective stories and ill-written autobiographies, as if I had never seen a book before. And how odd it is suddenly to discover among these collections an early work of your own! When nobody is looking, hurriedly, furtively, you take a peep or two at its inside. Not bad, you usually find yourself saying, really not bad at all; and you give that younger self a pat on the back—a good promising lad, that! But there is not much fun for a wet day to be had out of the books I left in this study, and I ignore them. There are, however, several pipes that have been here since last summer, oddities mostly, shameful whimsies in briar and vulcanite; and I feel disposed to try two or three of them, for it is certain I shall spend the rest of the day up here, steadily smoking.

I am, I suppose, that miserable thing—the slave of tobacco. But I am either so little or so much of a slave that after more than twenty-five years of it, I never feel the least touch of resentment. I regret nothing. If necessary I would rivet these chains on myself again. I don't know anything in this lower world of taste and smell that has given me so much pleasure as tobacco, and for the right mixture of honest Virginia artfully spiced with Latakia and Perique I would willingly give up all strong drink and rich food. I never smoke without being conscious that I am smoking and—unless something has

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

temporarily gone wrong—enjoying it too. To let smoke come dribbling out of one's mouth is unnatural, of course, but is it more unnatural than to be an author, steadily cashing in on one's fancies and opinions, tapping a living out of a typewriter? It is often called "a dirty habit," but I cannot see that it is any dirtier than most of our other habits, and it is far less gross than eating and drinking. It may be true that very good and great men, saints and heroes, were never heavy smokers, but neither, I have noticed, are very bad men or even common nuisances. Hitler and Mussolini are non-smokers and frown upon the practice. I suspect that here a couple of hundredweights of good tobacco might have saved Europe much expense and misery. Tobacco is dope, but it is the most innocent of the dopes and probably the enemy of the others. Especially in a pipe. Consider what happens. When we are young, at the university freshman stage, we buy pipes and puff away at them because we feel there is some connection between pipe smoking and deep thinking (*The Thinking Man Smokes A Peterson*, as the cunning advertisement used to run); and though for years we cannot think deeply, can hardly think at all, we puff and puff away, always looking vaguely like deep thinkers, until at last a little thought comes creeping through, nothing very original, nothing very penetrating, but still—thought. A New York journalist once wrote, quite bitterly,



that I was "the kind of Englishman who smokes a pipe." I have often wondered what he meant. The windows are now splashed with rain and very soon will be streaming. (Godshill may have gone under for ever.) I turn my back on them and fill one of the pipes I left here—an old curved Barling with a Sherlock Holmes look about it—and I wonder all over again what kind of Englishman it is who smokes a pipe, whether I am that kind, and, if I am, what is wrong with us.

No sooner do I go over to the fire than I have to come away again, to return to the windows, because an aeroplane, forced down by the thick low clouds, is roaring over the house, sounding horribly close, and I must watch it. I find it impossible to hear aeroplanes very distinctly and not go at once to keep an eye on them. I could not live close to an airport. The reason I must watch them is that, deep down, I am frightened of them. Whether this is a legacy from the last war, when the German planes took many a crack at me behind the line, or a shrinking anticipation of the next war, I don't know; but there it is—they frighten me. I feel that I do not really belong to their world and that they will do me in yet. It is all very well describing to me man's conquest of the air, the exquisite regions above the clouds, the dawns and sunsets of the pearl-pure upper spaces, the dramatic annihilation of distance; but in this matter I am one of the grumbling old school, a

stick-in-the-mud, a downright reactionary, and I say that I wish—and have wished these many years—that the things had never been invented. They should have been kept back until we were ready for them. It is not important that young men should be able to hurl themselves from one place to another at two hundred and fifty miles an hour. What is important is that some people should be able to think in peace and quiet. I will wager that ninety-nine air journeys out of every hundred are really concerned with some bit of nonsense—like signing up a film star or arranging a boxing match—that could have waited for the train or the boat. Most of the people we know who are just going or have just arrived by air would do no great harm to civilisation if they never travelled at all. It is true that Chamberlain took to the air to meet Hitler; but then if Hitler had not possessed a vast fleet of the monsters, Chamberlain could have sat on in London and snapped his fingers at him. We hear a good deal—and most of us have experienced it for ourselves—about the sense of detachment that visits the aviator, who does not feel that the relief map and its ant-hills far below have anything to do with him. And very dangerous, in my opinion, this sense of detachment can be too. Whatever the flying man may feel, the fact remains that that relief map is so much honest earth and those ant-hills are the abiding places of our brothers and sisters. The bombs you let fall are not merely making pretty

patterns (as young Mussolini suggested, in his account of the fun he had in Ethiopia) but are obliterating real homes and tearing their way through flesh and blood. It was suggested years ago, notably, I think, by Wells, that the airman would have a new point of view, widely different from that of the old-fashioned crawling landmen. Well, we have seen what that point of view is, and I for one do not like it. I do not want our rulers and statesmen to do their travelling ten thousand feet above our heads. That is no way to learn about our common humanity. They begin to take the relief-map-and-ant-hill view of us. Only very wise men are fit to be rushed through the sky in this fashion and, unfortunately, we are only producing more and more aeroplanes, not wisdom.

Back I go to the fire and make up my mind to stay there for the rest of the morning. Anybody would be entitled to laugh, I was thinking, if I should be overheard saying that I was in search of wisdom. In what retreat have I been meditating? When did I disappear from the foolish noisy world? What sage or *guru* has been directing and disciplining my mind? Scribbling, travelling, talking in public, working in theatres, is this the life for wisdom's pilgrim? It is not. But a man must lead his own kind of life, and that happens to have been mine. There is, I should like to think, a certain modesty in undertaking whatever most urgently offers itself; although pride must come in somewhere, so that though I will do what

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am asked to do, the shape and colour of the thing done must be of my own choice. But though my life on the outside may have been worlds away from the quiet paths that lead to wisdom, inside that life, in the secret relation between me and things, I have been something of a humble student. Put it no higher than this: I am a busy public entertainer—and I could not stop being one without trampling on a hundred different obligations—but I have my hobby like any other man, and it happens to be the search for wisdom. I look for it as other men look for rare birds. No doubt I lack the courage to break with everything but this search, just as the ornithological bank clerk lacks the courage to close his ledger for ever and go to the Andes to find the great white condor. But—give me my due—I also lack the staggering egoism. Who am I to say to my fellow citizens that I am not what they think I am, and not worse but better, a nobler being, though as yet only in embryo? And there are all the other obligations, the promises that must be kept. Again, though the world stands more in need of wisdom than of clowning, which is really what the newspapers are saying every day in their heaviest black type, even now it is better to be a good clown than a bad sage. Nevertheless, you cannot prevent the clown, even when he may be shouting or beating the drum in front of the booth, from playing the sage to himself. (Nor can you stop him from thinking that now his antics in the ring

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

have a new richness.) He too may feel in the dark of his deeper mind that his hand is now upon the silken cord, and that he is moving along it through the labyrinth towards daylight.

## II

IT WAS TWO YEARS AND SEVERAL MONTHS, I REMEMBERED, since I had written the last words of *Midnight On The Desert*. Where had I been, what had I done, since then? Early in January 1937 we had taken ship to Port Said. My wife still had to spend part of the winter in a desert climate, so this time instead of Arizona we were trying Egypt and the Sudan. It was a wretched voyage, with hardly a glimmer of sunshine, and we had colds and disliked the ship and wondered why we should pay so much to spend our time reading second-rate books in an uncomfortable cabin. I had promised, for the first time for years, really not to do any work at all during these next two months. This was to be a genuine holiday. Perhaps that made me hypercritical. Is this—I growled at Algiers, Genoa, Port Said—the world they idle in? Winter followed us to the very edge of the Red Sea. Even in Cairo it was not warm. The dragomen lurking outside Shepheard's Hotel looked olive-green with cold. At first sight Cairo was a French provincial city in which a Near Eastern carnival had been let loose. We liked it better afterwards, when we came to explore the bazaars and wandered from the glare

and confusion of the narrow streets into the mosques, with their strange cool silences and their mathematical graces, and had a glimpse of the ancient Mohammedan university at work. And the Museum, once you escaped from the idiotic patter of the guides, was glorious, and there we returned, day after day, not to stare with the crowd at the glittering vulgarities from Tutankhamen's tomb (though these were fascinating at first), but to admire the sculpture of the Old Kingdom. We were attracted too by the art, curiously modern in feeling, of Ikhnaton's brief reign, and I ordered a copy of the sketch-head of Nefertiti, one of the loveliest women's faces I have ever seen. By this time I was deep in Breasted's very solid history of Egypt, and had acquired much information that I have already forgotten. From the Museum at Cairo to the very last temple in the south, the vast grim temple of Abu-Simbel, we went by car, camel, donkey or boat to try and see everything there was to be seen, pyramids and temples and tombs, and I feel Professor Breasted himself would have had to applaud our energy and earnestness. The expense seemed to be fabulous. I have never before or since paid out so much, and here and now I announce that never again shall it happen. Every visitor to Egypt is regarded as a triumphant conqueror who should be distributing largesse. They have a technique there of extracting money from the tourist that is thousands of years old.

When our ancestors were daubing themselves with woad, these Egyptians were skinning tourists alive, and Greek tourists at that. Their patter and their outstretched palms are between you and all you would wish to enjoy. They quit their fields at dawn to see if you will throw them a penny, and the last glimmer of sunset lights up their *backsheesh*.

It may have been the sheer expensive worry of being a tourist there, or it may have been that I was dense and unreceptive, or it may be that Ancient Egypt has no secret whisper for my ear, but, whatever the reason, I must confess that though I was nearly always interested or amused, nothing I saw there made me feel very deeply. No strange emotions, no magical memories of other existences, disturbed my mind as I stared at the Pyramids or the Sphinx (which must have looked more impressive before they dug its body out of the sand) or wandered about Karnak or up the Valley of the Kings. Ouspensky in his *New Model of the Universe* has a fine passage describing his feelings as he gazed at the Pyramids and the Sphinx, but I felt none of these things. Nothing really happened inside my mind; there was no genuine *click*. I felt more in one minute when I first looked into the Grand Canyon than I felt during all those weeks in Egypt. If I have ever lived before, it was certainly not in Egypt, unless perhaps I had a brief existence during the short and stormy



reign of Ikhnaton, about whom I could not read and learn too much. But then Ikhnaton is a fascinating figure. It is as if an intelligent and sensitive young modern, one of the nicer products of Balliol and Bloomsbury, a sort of youthful Aldous Huxley, had been suddenly shot back four thousand years and found himself Amenophis the Fourth, Pharoah of Egypt. Naturally he would want to change everything, and this is what Amenophis the Fourth at once proceeded to do. He changed himself to Ikhnaton, changed the religion, the art, the manners; he lived a charming, informal domestic life with his pretty Nefertiti and his daughters; he wrote noble hymns to his solitary sun-god; he refused to continue the imperialistic and military tradition; he disliked ceremony; and in every way he behaved as if he were a nice young poet and intellectual of our own time instead of a Pharoah of the 18th Dynasty. He was completely unlike any of the scores and scores of Egyptian rulers who came before or after him. He represents a clean break with tradition. He made more changes in five years than the other Pharoahs did in two thousand years. He cannot possibly be explained by the usual rule-of-thumb historical methods. He is a Phœnix in the aviary. He is also the first definite *individual* known to human history. And nothing, either historically or in fiction, that has been written about him so far is good enough for him. One day, if I am spared and still have the

wits, I shall have a try at Ikhnaton. But he will take a bit of explaining.

So will some other things about Egypt. Why are the earliest things—monuments, sculpture, drawings—the best? Clearly the greatest Egypt was the Old Kingdom, so old that we cannot date it within five hundred years, half-lost in the mists of antiquity. Herodotus gaped at the Pyramids and the Sphinx just as we did, and he is nearer to us than he was to them. Perhaps the most thrilling sight in Egypt is the occasional glimpse you have of a tourist's name or initials carved at the bottom of some monument, for suddenly you realise that these tourists themselves belonged to the ancient world and that even in their time this Egypt was very, very old. The priests told these Greek tourists that they knew how old Egyptian civilisation was, that they had records going back thousands of years, but our archæologists say that those priests were lying, and they have cut its age down to about fifteen hundred years at the time, say, when Herodotus was there. But one day we may discover that the priests were nearer the truth than our experts. Certainly it is strange that all the great things come at the beginning of this immense civilisation. At one moment the Egyptians are neolithic creatures, squatting about chipping flints, and then suddenly they produce their greatest sculpture and drawings, carve the Sphinx, build the Pyramids. Then for the next three thousand years,

with various ups and downs, and not counting mere wealth and vulgar display as true civilisation, there is a steady decline. I say there is something very curious about all this. I know a good many of the learned arguments, and they still leave me dissatisfied. It may be sheer romantic weakness in me to have a fondness for those fanciful histories of our species, in which we are told that huge civilisations have risen and fallen, with Atlantis well in the middle of the picture, but these legends and fables satisfy something in me that is always left wondering and sceptical by the scientific accounts, those references to palæolithic and neolithic periods that endured so long and produced so little. The fanciful people may be unnecessarily complicating our history, but I feel that the scientists are almost deliberately simplifying it. They like to keep that prehistoric man shivering over his flints for scores of thousands of years. On the other hand, they hate the thought that gigantic proud civilisations, which had annual conferences of men who explained everything, may have dwindled to a mere rumour in men's imagination. And how gleefully they pounce upon instances of ignorance in our early civilisations! What, they sneer, no logarithms! (See Lancelot Hogben's *Mathematics For The Million* for many examples of this trick. He must think our children are delighted now to be bombed with such mathematical accuracy.) But for my part, I like to imagine that the earliest

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Egyptians borrowed their pyramids and sphinxes from a civilisation far older and greater than any known to the records.

I could not believe, however, in the Egyptian as the supreme mystery man of the ancient world, its master of hocus-pocus. Not, that is, after going there. We tend to think of the ancient Egyptians as strange, gloomy creatures, for ever brooding on the thought of death, simply because what is left of them chiefly comes out of tombs. But after you have stared at the pictures of their life that were carved and painted for the tombs, you realise that they must have been a cheerful, sensuous, busy, practical folk, fond of beer and picnics. And they must have been good to look at, these children of the sun, these brown broad-shouldered men and slender, painted girls. Oddly enough, you mark their descendants only among the poorest peasants, living in hovels on the edge of nothing. Stately Hatshepsut and the lovely Nefertiti stare as you rattle down their miserable village street, and Thutmosis the First and Rameses the Second may be seen stalking behind their half-starved donkeys. But we did meet two men of mystery, not including in this category the indifferent conjurors and lying fortune-tellers. The first was the famous Moussa, the snake-charmer. His claim was that he could smell out snakes and scorpions wherever you took him (and the choice of place was yours) and then charm them. We took him to the outskirts of

Luxor, into a deserted garden. First, he stalked up and down, brandishing his stick, and shouted to the snakes and scorpions in his own tongue—and presumably theirs too—that he was the great Moussa, famous among snakes and scorpions, and that if they came out he would do them no harm. Then he sniffed and smelt about, almost in dog fashion, and finally pulled out, one by one, a scorpion and several snakes from their various winter quarters. He performed the old Egyptian trick, known to Moses, of making the reptiles stretch out motionless and stiff, like sticks; and they did not spring to angry darting life again until he gave them the word. It was all very impressive, and we were glad to obtain a record in colour of his antics in our cine-Kodak—so that we have often watched Moussa all over again in Highgate Village—but we decided that he was able to find snakes anywhere because he brought them with him, discovering them in their hiding places only as the conjuror discovers the half-crown behind your left ear. Residents, however, assured us that they had seen him work stark naked, which would make it impossible for him to conjure the snakes, and he could not plant them beforehand because he did not know where he would be asked to perform his act. We did not know what to think. But shortly after we returned home we read that Moussa had died—of a snakebite.

The other man of mystery, unlike Moussa, was not

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

a professional entertainer, and indeed I think he was the only Egyptian—if he was an Egyptian—who did something for us without wanting money for it. He was a holy man in a village on the edge of the desert. There was nothing bearded and venerable about his appearance; he was a youngish fellow, not very healthy, with a quick, almost mischievous manner; but he had a definite air of authority. He invited us to visit him on an evening when his village choir, probably lay brothers of some order of howling dervishes, would be performing. He received us in a tiny courtyard, flickeringly lit with flares under the indigo velvet of the desert sky, and there he gave us sweet hot drinks, poured strong scent over our hands, and wrote out, in red ink, lucky talismans for us to keep under our pillows. The sick came to him to be healed, and nothing could be simpler than his method with them. He had a number of long palm-leaf stems, of various sizes, and, selecting the appropriate stem, he gave the sufferer a good whack with it across the afflicted part. Sometimes he whacked the invalid, roaring hard, right out into the night, while he himself roared equally hard with laughter. Not that he thought it all a joke; one could see that he was serious enough at heart; but he was a man clearly given to such strange, disconcerting explosions of mirth. Perhaps once you are really holy, many things seem laughable. In an adjoining and larger courtyard, lit with more flares, was the choir,

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

set out in two rows, the small front row consisting of solo singers, while in the back row was the chorus, inferior performers jammed close together. They were all men, and mostly young. Their eyes rolled and glittered with pious fervour. As they wailed and howled, usually in elaborately syncopated rhythm, they made the most complicated and tiring movements, so that at first it made you ache to watch them. Then you forgot to ache. You felt they were howling and swaying themselves into a frenzy. The merciless rhythm seemed to scoop out of the dark night a still darker hollow, a tunnel down which you were all moving. Reason and judgment were in rapid retreat. At any moment, you felt, the whole strange scene—the flickering courtyard, the holy man in his striped robe, giggling like a schoolgirl, the undulating dervishes with their glistening faces and rolling eyes—would vanish, and in its place, filling that tunnel of darker night, would be something stranger still, something huge, ebony and monstrous out of the heart of Africa. You had to hold tight to the last remaining threads of good sense. Let go, and anything might happen; you might find yourself an ibis or a crocodile, or wake out of a black trance to discover you were a blind beggar in Arabia.

Back in the hotel at Luxor, where the electric lights defied the wrath of Allah, we were all very sensible and rather gay over our whiskies-and-sodas, and we listened to the other swaying brown men,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

cousins to those we had left in the village, who nodded and bounced over their saxophones and drums to the tunes that Fred Astaire had danced to in Hollywood. In fact, we might have been in Hollywood. It was only when the moon rose and you wandered out for a last stroll that Egypt became herself. The early mornings and sunsets, about which we had heard so much, seemed to us much inferior to those in the Arizona desert. The middle of the day was a blank hot weariness. But a full moon over Luxor works miracles: there, at last, is the silver Nile, the old enchantress; the Valley of the Kings, beyond the river, is a landscape conjured out of pearl and gossamer; and the avenue of sphinxes at Karnak runs clean out of this world. It is late at night, when the last dragoman or pedlar has vanished, when Cook's office is shuttered, when the guide books are forgotten and the dynasties are all one, and the moon begins to throw her pale bridge across the milleniums, it is then that Egypt becomes again the magical old kingdom of our boyhood fancy, worthy at last, during this brief hour, of Rider Haggard.

We stayed longest at Assuan, partly because it has the best winter climate, being dry as an old bone, but also because there is hardly anything to see there. Instead of being an open-air museum, it is a real place. You can lounge about in it, staring at the blazing flowers, the bright birds, and the green river. The other guests at the hotel seem more cosmopoli-



tan, more amusing, and less stuffily rich, than they are in Luxor and Cairo. I had only one disagreeable day in Assuan, and that was the day we spent riding camels in the desert, for the desert was stony, grim and very hot, and the camels—vast sneering beasts—doubled one up like a jack-knife at every stride. It was like doing six hours continuous bending from the waist in a jolting oven. The camels that carried Gordon and T. E. Lawrence and other heroes so smoothly and fleetly across the desert must have died with them. We spent another afternoon at a Bisharin camp, trying to obtain some good coloured movies of these picturesque children of Nature, with their handsome aquiline features and fuzzy hair; and it must be put on record that these same children of Nature have a most elaborate scale of dues for photographers, so elaborate and decisive that if they had produced agents, books of press-cuttings, and contracts to sign I would not have been greatly surprised. Nor would I have blamed them. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot surround primitive folk with our mechanical devices and make them self-conscious, aware of their entertainment value to ourselves, and then expect them to remain all naïve. It is curious, perhaps significant, that the primitive mind takes at once to our mechanical tricks. Now that we are nearly all fourteen-year-olds playing with gadgets, the gulf between the so-called civilised and the less advanced

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

peoples is much less than it was, let us say, in the 18th Century. The black boys who drove us sometimes in these parts did it just as well as any white chauffeur. I have no doubt they can clean and work a machine-gun just as efficiently as the European soldier. And this is not a line of thought that can be followed with pleasure.

From Assuan we took the little steamer to Wadi Halfa, one of the hottest places in the world, and from there crossed eight hundred miles of the glaring Nubian Desert, in surprising comfort, over the railway line that Kitchener built, to Khartoum. Here, outside working hours, during which a great deal of very good work is actually done, everybody tries to behave as if it were the holiday season in Frinton or Torquay. I never remember within the same space of time attending so many tennis, tea, cocktail and dinner parties. (It is only fair to point out, however, that this was in Khartoum's most social time of year.) Unlike many of my colleagues, who have a nasty trick of biting the hands that fed them, I am not disposed to sneer at these very hearty English goings-on in the tropics. I should do the same thing myself. After all, these men and women are a long, long way from home, a handful of English folk in a vast burning desert, many of them coming into Khartoum after months and months up-country, where they have never seen another European face, and it is natural that they should want to be active, hospitable and

cosy together, after their own home fashion. If anybody retorts that they should not be there at all, bossing the blacks, I would advise a brief study of local conditions when the Madhi reigned in Omdurman. Dealing with a much simpler folk, and liking them better, our Sudanese Service, I imagine, has been much more successful than our Indian. Certainly the members of it we met seemed excellent specimens of our race and—a good sign—very enthusiastic about their work. If Khartoum was the usual colonial hotbed of snobbery, jealousy, intrigue and petty scandal, then I was too stupid to notice it, and I think I have as good an eye for human weaknesses as the other novelists who go jeering round the Empire. Instead of a fit of disgust, all I got was a tennis elbow, the result of trying to keep up, afternoon after afternoon, with so many still young and recent Blues. The town itself was too hot and dusty and flavourless for my taste, but there was nothing wrong with the British there. Such weaknesses as they had were not peculiar to them but belonged to our blandly uncultured race. And the fact that they were so hospitable and kind to two visitors entitles them not to my sneers but to my thanks. Which is, at least, a nice change.

My wife, whose hobby is ornithology, had armed herself with telescopic lenses and tropical packs of colour film, and was anxious to go farther south still, up the White Nile, to where the sandbanks and

marshes and reeds begin. Somewhere there is the ornithologist's paradise, where all the birds in the world live when they are really at home. She said there was a chance of our going up the river, not in the usual slow and overcrowded public steamer, but in splendid privacy, by some kind of magic. I was against it, partly because I was rather worried about our time-table and I had things to do at home, but also because in our domestic circuit of travel enterprise and adventure I represent the negative current. If her tendency was to say *Yes* to every suggestion, mine was—and still is—to say *No*. Hers is the irresistible force, mine the immovable body. It makes a good balance. The reason why I am so unenterprising in travel—for I do not lack enterprise in other matters—is that I am no longer romantic about it. When any journey is proposed, I am convinced that it will be uncomfortable and tedious, not worth the alternating spells of waiting about and fuss. My inward eye is now steadily fixed on the drearier side of the business. But then I am lucky enough to have a profession that has its own adventures and excitements. I do not feel it is necessary for me to walk across Mongolia to prove that I am really alive. And I came out of the War determined to over-act, if anything, the part of the comfortable *bourgeois* in slippers. With the result that when I am finally lured on a journey I am frequently surprised to discover what fun it is.

This is what happened now. After saying *No* and *Certainly not* and *Wouldn't dream of it*, there I was, sailing up the White Nile, in a private barge for the two of us that had been attached to the irrigation department's own steamer. This little voyage was the best thing that came to us in Africa. I have always enjoyed journeys by river. You move at the right easy pace, effortlessly as in a dream, and the scenery glides past at the perfect tempo. There was always something you were glad to see—a hippo submerging like a submarine, a flock of strange birds, a group of Shilluks, exquisitely poised, as if a sculptor had been arranging them, on the nearer bank. Our host and hostess were charming, and at night, in the little top saloon, a tiny lighted place in the vast nocturnal mystery of river and sky, we had good talk. I was sorry now that our plans were so inelastic, but there was no help for it, because all the later planes and steamers from Egypt were fully booked up. It would have been delightful to have gone all the way with them, towards Uganda. As it was, we had to leave the White Nile and cross by road to the Blue Nile, with many an ornithological interruption, for now the birds were magnificent, and they ranged from the tiny Abyssinian bee-eater to the greater bustard. At Sennar, on the Blue Nile, we were entertained by the gigantic and genial medical officer, whose hobby was driving four-in-hand. It says much for our race that, in addition to doing a great deal of hard work,

he had contrived, there in tropical Africa, under a sky of molten bronze, lost among staring Nubians, to build himself out of anything and everything a kind of coach. There it was, bright with new paint, ready to take the Brighton Road. Then I remember an early morning visit to a patch of forest, before the sun was far up, when the solemn chill sweetness of dawn was still in the air. The birds must have been good, for in my wife's notebook I read: "red-breasted shrike, Abyssinian bee-eater, sun bird, lesser hornbill, indigo and rosy buntings, Abyssinian roller, green parakeet," but I do not recall a single flash of their wings. What has stayed in my memory is a host of little grey monkeys that gambolled on the edge of the green mystery. I remember too an evening visit, just after sunset, to the sandbanks and marshes of the Blue Nile, where ruffs came not in battalions but in army corps. The sky rained ruffs upon the sandbanks. When you thought all the ruffs in the world had arrived and that even if there could be any more there would not be room for them, there was another storm of them, and down they settled, miraculously finding space for themselves. They were halting here on their way north, for early summer would find them far away, round the Baltic. Then there was a rum afternoon when we rattled across the desert and finally arrived at an enormous rock that looked like a smaller Gibraltar. But it was not a fortress but a fantastic kind of welfare station, which had been

established there by a very wealthy enthusiast of our own race. I may be doing this enterprise a serious injustice, but I must confess that my visit to it seemed like a chapter in a Sudanese *Alice in Wonderland*. I could make no sense of anything I saw and heard. We climbed the steep rock, and discovered that the little Italian gentleman in charge was playing a rudimentary croquet with several grinning Sudanese. Little black children wandered about like ebony Adams and Eves. The Italian talked with enthusiasm and as he talked he led us through a series of caves or rooms hollowed out of the rock, and these places were filled with dozens of large packing cases. I wish I could remember the fantastic assortment of things that were bursting out of these cases, but I seem to recall artificial flowers, flags and tin trumpets, and if anybody told me there were also ships and shoes and sealing-wax, I should not be surprised. Nothing about this rock in the desert, with all its packing cases of odds and ends miles from anywhere, its plans to begin some mysterious great work any year now, made any sense to me. Perhaps the jolting I had had under the hot sun stole away my wits. Perhaps I dreamt half of it. Or again, perhaps for the last thirty years there has been a plan for hunting the Snark from there, and of course for snark-hunting you probably need whole caves stuffed with artificial flowers and pipe organs and odd brown boots and the flags of all the South American republics. And I never

remember seeing a happier and more enthusiastic middle-aged man than that little Italian, left up there among his blacks, probably waiting for the next consignment of harpoons and banjo strings and sections of snow ploughs. He was having fun out of his solemn nonsense. That is the more than the rest of us can say now. Let him stay on his fantastic rock.

As we went north, to return home, the outward temperature fell and my inward temperature rose. At every stage of the journey I lost more and more of my temper, for you cannot travel in Egypt without a great deal of fuss, and no man suffers it less gladly than I do. (Once, bang in the middle of a baking afternoon, when every piece of our luggage had disappeared and we were due to leave in three minutes, an old woman tried to sell me hard-boiled eggs.) When we arrived at Port Said, after a packed and suffocating train, I felt like a homicidal bankrupt. We were roused before dawn to board the P. and O., which was still asleep and dreaming of Viceroy, not of tourists who had to come creeping aboard in the dark; so then I stamped and stormed about until a large British breakfast was set before me, after which I gradually subsided into being an ordinary sensible man. But we agreed that if we ever had another African holiday it should begin and not end somewhere near Khartoum. We would glide on and on and on in little river steamers, until at last all tropical Africa had gone by like a dream.



### III

WE RETURNED TO A SLEETY AND SHIVERING England, into whose public mind thoughts of the forthcoming coronation were being steadily injected. We now had two pretty little princesses, so that it did not much matter, it seemed, that we also had an Empire rapidly declining in prestige and busy throwing away all strategic advantages. There was not much news for me. *Midnight On The Desert* had come out, and appeared to be generally liked. There were, of course, the usual exceptions: those queer young men who never even try to create anything much themselves but who pop up for a season or so to be the guardians of the gate of true letters and then disappear. I have two objections to them: they are too timid and respectful in personal intercourse, and much too ferocious and arrogant with me in print. All I ask for, in person or in print, is to be treated as an equal. I can readily understand that in the eyes of young men with their way to make I am rapidly becoming one of those fat old frauds who must be denounced; that is fair enough; but I feel entitled to be condemned on terms of more or less equality; I cannot see why the verdict should come down to me from some remote height of achievement, when the

author of it has done nothing so far but write a few short reviews, three poems and half a short story. It is strange that English editors, still trying to make a success of an intelligent periodical, have never realised that these bits of desiccated superciliousness are not only the sure sign of an inferior critical mind, but that also they do not win but always alienate the public. One of the reasons why the literary review has lost influence during these last twenty years is that people will not accept this cocktail-party silliness as criticism worth reading.

Within a day or two, I had to go to Liverpool, where the Playhouse Company was rehearsing a new play of mine called *The Bad Samaritan*, which I was trying out there. It was a sardonic comedy, with a good basic idea, but it had a messy third act, and indeed needed not only re-writing but entirely re-shaping. Ironically enough, this was the only play I have ever written in the manner of the text-books, first building up a detailed synopsis, then clothing each scene with dialogue. The result was that my real imagination never got to work anywhere; it was all done with the surface of the mind, like a film script; so craftily and coldly put together that nowhere was there any life in it. I was so much dissatisfied with it that not only did I not bring it to London but I did not even have it printed. (A similar play, tried out in Liverpool but not brought to London, *The Roundabout*, I put into print, and

it has been produced by repertory and amateur companies all over the place, from Finland to the Middle West.) Yet it was this very faulty play, *The Bad Samaritan*, that brought me the only offer I have ever had from a stranger to finance a piece of mine. We had a letter from a well-known firm of solicitors, people who knew the Theatre, saying that their client, a well-to-do woman, was anxious to put up several thousand pounds to produce this play in the West End. And there were no conditions about casting and control. The money was ours. I replied that in my opinion—and, after all, I was the author—the play was not good enough. All this is so unusual that it deserves to be put on record.

Just before *The Bad Samaritan* had said good-bye for ever to Liverpool, and to the stage in general, I had to dash out to Florence. The oldest child, then a student in Paris, had gone on a cheap students' trip—a much too cheap a trip—to Italy, and had been taken seriously ill in Florence. My wife had gone out to nurse her and to try and introduce a little method into the sketchy medical services of the Italians. The child was worse, with a very high temperature that would not come down. The necessary serum was not to be found anywhere in Italy, which has been too busy lately to bother about serums, so I took it with me from Harley Street. It was a journey like a bad dream, when your very eyelids are stiff with anxiety and every mile and every

minute seem agonisingly elongated, and yet the whole thing is not quite real. Actually the serum was never used, for suddenly the vitality of the seventeen-year-old asserted itself, and very soon the patient was convalescent. By this time I had contrived a little illness of my own. So the three of us found ourselves up in the convalescent home, very well run by Irish and Australian nuns, at Fiesole. I had a very dear old sister looking after me; we had fine little chaffing matches; and always she shook her head when she saw me, there in bed, smoking my pipe and scribbling away. I was re-writing a play that I had begun on a freighter from Los Angeles: *I Have Been Here Before*. One by one we crept out into the garden to look down upon the Arno and the shining city; and very soon we were taking the bus down to Florence and wandering through the enchanted streets.

Why should this one small city, within a hundred years, have produced so much great art? How explain these sudden strange flowerings of the spirit? Climate, social organisation, economics, religion, all these are called upon to give their reasons, but it seems to me that on the conventional view of man and his activities these reasons, though sensible enough, do not explain everything. In fact, if you see men as entirely separate beings, solid little lumps of ego, merely influencing each other externally, then you cannot explain Florence or any other sudden uprush of creative genius anywhere. We are not so separate as

we first appear. There exists, at the very least of it, the Collective Unconscious that Jung accepts. Our minds have common roots with other minds. What feeds one will also feed another. Without removing any credit from the individual men of genius, we may declare that what produced them in such sudden abundance was the common mind or the collective unconscious of the community. This focused its attention upon the visual arts, and the result was this splendour of creation. Birmingham and Cleveland have excellent art galleries and schools, but they are not the rivals of medieval Florence because this communal mind in Birmingham or Cleveland is chiefly concerned with other things. There is not enough sustenance in the roots. If all the people in London suddenly developed a deep passion for the drama, then very soon London would have a school of great dramatists. Something like this happened once, all in the space of half a lifetime, and there was such a school and at its head was William Shakespeare. You cannot explain this merely by imitation and emulation. It goes deeper. There is a vast struggling world-mind, of which all our individual minds are but the cells, and now and again, in this place or that, this world-mind suddenly expresses itself in a particular form. As it did once, for our delight, in the Florence of the Medici. And as it is certainly not doing in the Florence of Mussolini.

During our two absences from home, one very close

friend and several other good friends had died, and the London we returned to, now bustling about for the coronation, seemed sadly narrower and chillier because they were no longer there. Of the boys I had played with as a boy, more than half were killed in the War. Of the men I had come to know well during my first years in London, more than half had already gone. As Lamb pointed out in a famous passage, our own lives shrink with these succeeding deaths. As we huddle together after each funeral, we close our ranks, hiding the gaps, but the little company of friends begins to dwindle miserably. Even now, in early middle life, I know intimately more dead than living folk. In old age we must be for ever nodding and grumbling among strangers. The old are right to say—as they do all say, even the professionally young and optimistic ancients, when they are off duty—that the world is now a poor place, for with the passing of every friend, and even of every constant enemy, a light goes out, and you are left standing in a smaller, colder world. And always, I think, no matter what our beliefs about death may be, it is not really for the dead themselves we mourn, but for ourselves and these shrinking and chilling lives that we must see out to the end.

But now there bounced into my life the astonishing figure of Jed Harris, the brilliant New York producer and director, who had been responsible for some of the most sensational theatrical successes of

that sensational and theatrical city. (You can almost see the neon lights going up in my prose.) He arrived in Highgate Village one morning, for he had heard I had just finished a play. He talked without stopping—and talked very well too—all day, and then went off with the script of *I Have Been Here Before*, which I gathered was at once the best and the worst play that had ever been written. He began to bombard me with suggested cuts and improvements, and many of his suggestions I was only too glad to adopt. For two reasons. First, I was so close to the play, which was very difficult and had already been written several times, that I could no longer see it properly. Secondly, I knew that Jed Harris, well-known as a ruthless editor of plays, as producer and excitement-injector, had a touch of real theatrical genius, and was just the man to have no patience with my lumbering attempts to suggest rather subtle ideas in dramatic form. Thus, the present shape of the play owes a good deal to him, and I have never made any secret of my indebtedness. But now comes what still seems to me the most astonishing incident in my theatrical life. He returned to New York, and we corresponded, and later in the summer I explained what I proposed to do with the play in England. (It was the American production that excited him.) He wrote to say he was coming over to settle our plans. He cabled me from the *Berengaria* to say he would be arriving in a couple of days. I awaited his arrival in

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

London. Several days went past, and I had no communication from him. I knew he was in London, for various friends of mine had talked to him. I had my secretary and the agent for the play and his secretary all trying to discover where Mr. Jed Harris was staying. We failed to find him, and he left again for New York without exchanging one word with me. Months afterwards I heard that he considered that I had treated him badly. Certainly I had neglected to use bloodhounds to trace him, after he had crossed the Atlantic to see me, but short of that I had employed all the usual methods, whereas he had only to pick up a telephone to talk to me. Why he suddenly changed his mind, after coming three thousand miles, and why he did not grant me the elementary courtesy of learning from him that he had altered his plans, and why, after behaving so discourteously and mysteriously, he should imagine he had been badly treated, these are things I shall never know. It was said of this brilliant young man, at one time, that he had a passion for startling people. He never startled me, but, if it is any satisfaction to him, he must be told here and now that he certainly succeeded in mystifying me, and that he remains in my mind, which regards him without rancour, as the *Great Broadway Enigma*—the whole sign picked out in flashing lights. And this ought to be a satisfaction to him.

They were now lighting up all London for the



coronation. The Press had been working hard on this function for months and months, and the public would have had to have been far more unsympathetic towards the whole business than they were to have withstood such a tremendous campaign. The cynical view was, of course, that the people had simply gone down before this terrific onslaught of all the forces of boost and ballyhoo, and that the excitement, which was real enough, was the natural result of all this artful propaganda. The sentimental view, which found its way into nearly all the newspapers, was that this was the opportunity of the people to show their loyalty, devotion, affection towards the Crown. These royal personages, riding about like fairy-tale characters in glass coaches, were not only friendly and dutiful fellow creatures but also symbols of the unity of a great empire. It seemed to me that both the cynical and officially sentimental accounts of the matter had some truth in them, but that neither of them was adequate as a full explanation of this large-scale excitement. Nor do you get the full explanation by adding the two together, publicity plus public loyalty. I felt there were other—deeper and more obscure—reasons for the tremendous response of the crowd to the appeal of this function. These reasons are important and should not be overlooked by those who are planning for the future.

In spite of increasing opportunities for pleasure, our modern life, especially in a great industrial com-

munity, tends to be largely monotonous and colourless. And people like a show. It is true they are provided with many shows, but they are not the right kind of shows. They do not mean anything. They are merely ingenious and superficially gay, like musical comedies and spectacular films. They may be pageantry but they are not significant pageantry. Man seems to have a deep-seated need of significant pageantry. He demands highly-coloured and elaborate symbolism. The great cities of the past, Thebes, Babylon, Nineveh, Athens, Carthage, Tyre, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Florence, medieval Paris and London, all glowed and glittered with this kind of pageantry, sometimes civic and secular, sometimes religious. Even the ordinary daily life of the past was coloured with symbolism. If we were suddenly shot back into the Middle Ages, we should feel we were living intensely through our eyes in a way we do not live nowadays. We should find ourselves in a world of significant shapes and colours. Even to-day, when we decide to celebrate on a large scale, we are compelled by the poverty of our own resources to imitate our ancestors. The flags and banners and coloured shields at your coronation tell their own tale. The dictators have been artful in feeding this old human hunger for significant shows. They may not be able to carry out their economic promises, but as masters of the pageant they have been superbly efficient. The extraordinary interest

shown by Americans in the coronation cannot be accounted for on any sentimental-political grounds. Most Americans have learned at school to regard the British Monarchy as the ancient enemy. They owe it nothing in the way of loyalty and affection. But anybody who knows America must have noticed how eagerly its citizens, starved of traditional ceremonies, clutch at any bit of significant pageantry. They saw in our coronation a superb show that did at least mean something, and so they could not help being fascinated and moved. The whole English-speaking race began cheering together. Off they went—flags, banners, beacons, bands, processions—Long live the King and God bless him!

From all this you may draw the conclusion, as all the Tory leader-writers did, that the people were only waiting to show their loyalty to and affection for the Crown. There is, however, another conclusion that seems to me of more importance. It is that the people are weary of a world of empty shows and dingy routine. They are glad of an excuse to break out of it, if only for one day. A coronation is such an excuse, hallowed by tradition and trumpeted by the Press. The streets, those endless dreary streets of North or South London, of Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham, could be hidden for one day behind gay bunting and coloured lights. Here at last, for millions of simple citizens, were beauty and joy. I watched the excited crowds late on the night

before the coronation, especially the younger folk, milling up and down, and asked myself what they had in this world. They had wandered away from religion but had not even arrived yet at science. Great music, drama, art, they knew little or nothing of these. They had lost the fields and the woods but had not exchanged them for a truly civilised urban life. Most of them probably did not know how to make love or even to eat and drink properly. They were not even the old happy-go-lucky mob, living with a certain fine carelessness in picturesque squalor. The game had been heavily rigged against them. But they hungered for beauty and joy, as we all hunger for beauty and joy; and so they saved up their shillings, they waited all night, to see the procession, the soldiers and the fairy-tale coach. So much wealth, so much time, so much energy, could be spared without protest for the crowning of a king, a ceremony with hardly a glimmer of real significance left, an immense empty shell of a function. But to crown at last these people themselves, to ennoble the whole kingdom, where were the wealth and time and energy for this task? Who would, after taking down the bunting and the lights, tear down the streets themselves, and build a nobler, happier, beautiful Britain?

## IV

THE LOSS OF FRIENDS AND THOUGHTS OF DEATH AND change had brought me to a sombre mood that the organised cheering and flag-waving of the coronation could do nothing to lighten. Such work as I was doing kept me employed, for in addition to tidying up *I Have Been Here Before* I had to write an easy piece specially for amateurs to perform, in a national competition organised by the *News-Chronicle*; but it did not remove my inward melancholy. This was blown away by the arrival, like a flash, of what seemed to me a glorious idea. I can remember the very moment when it came. I was lunching with my sister, who was staying with us in Highgate during Whitsuntide, and we were idly discussing old acquaintances and especially a family I had known before the War. Suddenly I saw that there was a play in the relation between a fairly typical middle-class provincial family and the theory of Time, the theory chiefly associated with J. W. Dunne, over which I had been brooding for the past two years.\* The idea was not the usual possible good idea one jots down in a notebook and then leaves for a year or two. It excited me at once, and I had to

\* See *Midnight on the Desert*

begin sketching out the general action of the play. Within a day or two, having come down here to the Isle of Wight, I had made out a list of the characters and told myself what sort of people they were. The First and Third acts were set in 1919, and I needed some "period" details for these scenes; but I could not wait until we returned to London, where I could do my little bit of research, so I left the two 1919 acts and plunged boldly into the contemporary one, Act Two. With almost no preparation, without any of the usual brooding and note-making, I wrote this Act Two of *Time And The Conways* at full speed. It seemed to cost me no more thought and trouble than if I were dashing off a letter to an old friend. Page after page, scene after scene, went off effortlessly, with hardly a correction on my typescript. I did not stay up late at night, drink strong coffee, put wet towels on my head; I kept a bank clerk's hours and almost behaved like one; and yet within two days I had finished this long and complicated act; and what I wrote then, with only two or three tiny alterations, was rehearsed, played, and afterwards printed.

Now this has been said to be one of the most brilliant second acts of our time. Even people who did not care much for the play as a whole were enthusiastic about this act. When I came to watch it being rehearsed, I saw that I had solved some very difficult technical problems, and, indeed, that writing these

scenes was like walking a tightwire. But I had not walked a tightwire. I had run along it, quite unconscious of any difficulty or danger. What had enabled me to do this? This is the important question, and the sole reason why I have described how I wrote the act. Any of the nonsensical scenes in, say, *The Bad Samaritan* had required far more thought and effort than this whole difficult act. Why? I shall be told that this is because one play was in my true creative vein and the other was not. But this does not take us very far. It does not explain how a number of tricky technical problems were solved at top speed and without effort. The Unconscious Mind is now brought in. I had really been pondering over this act and its problems for some time, and gradually the Unconscious somehow worked it all out and shot up the results as fast as they were needed. Something like this does happen with some pieces of work. They come easily, smoothly, because most of the work has been done during long spells of brooding. A play of mine called *Eden End* came like that. I had wandered round that Yorkshire country doctor's house for a long time. But here there had been none of this. I had started almost "from scratch." There had been no long period of preliminary work in the hinterland of my mind. The Unconscious had had no time to become my Slave of the Ring on this particular job. So we must now fall back on our old fairy god-mother, Inspiration. But this is at once vague and awkward.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is awkward because even my vanity shrinks from a public claim to have been "inspired." It is vague because as a verb it always has an object but no subject. Who or what did the inspiring? My own explanation, which is tentative, is nearly as vague, but it does suggest a new line of enquiry.

I believe, then, that during these few hours of effortless but extremely rewarding creation, I was able, without being then aware of it, to "tap" a reservoir of creative energy and skill, which reservoir is really the source of all so-called inspiration. Into my mind came flooding a much greater mind. Do not mistake me here. I am not claiming that a play of mine was really the work of some world-mind. This would be a monstrous impertinence. The play itself, the people and scenes in it, all these are coloured and shaped by my own ego, and exhibit all my own particular weaknesses and merits. But that triumphant rush of energy and skill, enabling me to run across the dramatic tightwire effortlessly, just for this one act, was not really my own doing, and owed its existence to the fact, which might or might not be the product of chance, that this immensely greater mind could for the time being sustain my own mind. I was indeed not so much a creator myself as an instrument of creation. Such skill as I had was a mere sharpening of the pencil that this mysterious hand might suddenly use. I have always been inclined to believe that the artist is really more of a technician



and less of a genuine creator than he often pretends or is thought to be, though this may seem to contradict what I have just said about my play being my own. But what is called creative imagination seems to me not a mere by-product of the workings of the individual mind—this is probably Fancy, which might help to explain the difference between Fancy and Imagination that Coleridge and the romantics were always worrying about—but a kind of vital link between our minds and this world-mind, which may lend us its own insight into the life about us or give us glimpses of other modes of being. Again, the sudden arrival of what seems to us a wonderful idea, bringing with it a state of genuine ecstasy, may be the result of a temporary union with this greater mind. And again, when we feel exhausted and there is still much to be done and we pray in an open selfless mood for more energy, often receiving it in a surprising measure, it sometimes seems as if we are being sustained by that greater mind. (I am well aware of the fact that every great religion the world has known observes and explains these things.) To many people, all this to-do about my Second Act will seem vague and rather pompous, yet I am sure no author, painter, musician, having known the same experience, will agree with them, or consider it a waste of time to try and pluck the heart out of this shining mystery, which occasionally irradiates the inward life of every artist.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It never surprises me that people who work in the Theatre are nearly always very superstitious. It is a life shaped to confirm the astrologers, for in the Theatre nearly every enterprise, from start to finish, either goes wonderfully right or dreadfully wrong. All the things outside your own control seem to decide, nearly always from the very beginning, to be with you or against you. *Time And The Conways*, in England, not in America, was one of the lucky enterprises. Ease and good fortune smiled upon everything we did. The right director, the right theatre, the one actress in the country for the leading part, all were available, and we soon assembled one of the very best and happiest teams I have ever had in a play. This was my fifth production at the Duchess Theatre, working with my friend J. P. Mitchelhill, and it was to be my last under his ownership, for he had arranged to sell the theatre. This production gave our joint enterprise a lovely Indian Summer. Everything went well; the play was warmly welcomed, except by those people who hate everything I do; and the pretty little theatre was full at every performance.

In the introduction to the volume *Two Time Plays*, I have already replied to two familiar criticisms of *Time And The Conways*, that I "loaded the dice" against the family in Act Two, that the whole play was deeply pessimistic, and I do not need to repeat my arguments here. One good result of the play's

success was that it turned the attention of many people towards J. W. Dunne and his Serialism, and it brought me into contact with him again. Indeed, it was he who was responsible for one of the very strangest scenes that can have ever been witnessed in any theatre. He was delighted with the play and the acting, and it was agreed between us that he should come, after a matinée, and meet the cast and have a talk to them. He felt that the players ought to understand the theory of Time they were presenting dramatically, and so he gave them a little lecture upon it. There he was, with a blackboard and diagrams, airily referring to Einstein and Minkowski and the "Miller effect," and there they were, still in their costumes and make-up, pretending to understand and incidentally giving the performance of their lives. No scene in the play, or in any play I have written, was as delicious, as absurd, as touching, as queerly significant in its deepest implications, as this one of the earnest original thinker with his difficult diagrams and the bewildered painted players: it was a scene by that master dramatist in whose vast repertory company we all have our parts. Nobody less could have imagined and produced it.

Before *Time And The Conways* had opened, we were already rehearsing *I Have Been Here Before*. At last the idea that had burst upon me one night in Arizona had taken solid four-dimensional shape. (It is this thought that more than compensates the

dramatist for all his miseries.) The difficulties that had avoided my other Time play production crowded in on this one, difficulties about a theatre, director, cast. But when everything was more or less settled and we were down to work, I found that I had had one stroke of luck, for in Wilfrid Lawson, an actor of great originality and power, I had found the perfect Ormund. He had been sent to me, probably because he was chiefly known as a character actor, to play the old German, but I saw him as Ormund. I was right, for he gave a tremendous performance, and not just at the opening, but steadily throughout the run. Curiously enough, *I Have Been Here Before*, though nearly always more enthusiastically praised than *Time And The Conways* and a solidly successful production, always played to rather smaller audiences, though this might be because the Royalty, condemned even then to be torn down, was not now as good a playhouse as the Duchess. Some remarks I have already made about this play are, I think, worth repeating, if only because playgoers who have only just seen a production of it by their local repertory company still send me bewildered enquiries. In the first place, then, it is not—and was never intended to be—a play about reincarnation. It is a play about recurrence, a theory I openly borrowed from Ouspensky's *New Model of the Universe*. Reincarnation says that we make many appearances, as many different personalities, in many

different ages. Recurrence, as interpreted by Ouspensky, says we lead our own lives, with some differences, over and over again. (This must not be confused with Nietzsche's notion, which has nothing to recommend it, that everything must repeat itself at immensely long intervals because similar sets of conditions will arise in the universe. Ouspensky's theory is much more subtle than that, and is based on his belief that Time is really three-dimensional.) Actually, I think that reincarnation is perhaps a more attractive and more plausible theory than this of recurrence, but, I repeat, it has nothing to do with my play. As the whole action turns on the idea of recurrence, for you have to assume that some of the events at the inn have happened to the same people there over and over again, I have never been able to understand how people could tell me they had enjoyed it as "a play about reincarnation." An even more important point is that it is not necessary to agree with Dr. Görtler's theories of Time and destiny to enjoy the play or to fall in with my main purpose in writing it. I wanted to make dramatic use of the familiar but always eerie feeling that we have been actors in a certain scene before, of the sense, known to most of us though not to all, of *déjà vu*. But what I wanted more than that was to present dramatically a kind of Everyman of my own generation. This character, Ormund, would represent the deep distrust of life felt by so many moderns.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

He would be a man with a wounded psyche. The play would show how at last he came to believe that the universe was not hostile or indifferent to his deepest needs. I placed him between a typically cocksure young materialist, busy over-simplifying everything, and a mystic. It was this latter character that had given me so much trouble, because in the first two drafts of the play the mystic was not a being of our world at all but a transient from some other sphere, the sort of figure that can be just managed, with some care, in a novel, but is a deadly liability in a play. I rather enjoy technical difficulties in my plays, but this mysterious being was too much for me and it was not until I substituted for him an exiled German professor, a part that plays better than you think it would merely after reading it, that *I Have Been Here Before* began to look like something possible. Yet it was one of the earlier and very faulty versions that I had shown to Barrie—and I think this was the very first time I had ever sent a script to a fellow writer, for I tend to be shy and secretive about unproduced plays—and Barrie, who was interested in my work and sometimes sat like a gnome in his vast fireplace and discussed dramatic technique, was immensely enthusiastic. He even said that the Second Act curtain, the strange silent exit of Görtler from the inn, was the most imaginative and haunting he had ever known. So I felt even then there was hope.

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

So the early autumn of 1937 found me with two plays, both serious plays with very unusual themes, that had opened with quite astonishing success. At the same time I was doing what I could to prepare for the production of yet a third play, *People At Sea*, a piece of less originality and force than the other two, an attempt to write a kind of socially symbolic melodrama, which I had written too hastily and light-heartedly perhaps, though I am still prepared to maintain that it is by no means negligible. My own producing company was not doing this third play. It had been acquired by a Shaftesbury Avenue management, which wanted to do it later in the autumn. I was now almost due to sail for New York. My wife and the children had already sailed in our old friend the *Pacific Reliance* for the West Coast, via the Panama Canal. So I had just time, before catching the *Queen Mary*, to supervise a try-out of *People At Sea* at the Bradford Civic Theatre, of which I happen to be president, and to do some hasty re-writing and casting for the London production. That the play was unsuccessful was largely, I think, my own fault, not so much because of mistakes in writing and in casting, but because I should not have allowed it to be done at all when I knew I had to be three thousand miles away from rehearsals. Some plays—and my own *Dangerous Corner* is one of them—are so sharply contrived that it does not matter if the author never goes near a rehearsal, but *People At*

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Sea*, loose in construction and depending on atmosphere and crafty playing, is not one of them. I ought to have been there. But I had to leave for America at the beginning of October, and in order to get away at all I had found myself doing five men's work. For several weeks I lived the life of a madman. I had no less than three new plays on hand almost at the same time; I had to write a whole series of articles for a Sunday newspaper, which had had my promise to do them and had announced them; I had to prepare for the whole winter's absence in America, where a lecture tour was booked for me and I had arrangements to make about plays. At every step there were people who had to be seen. Letters that demanded an immediate reply came in blizzards. I have known dramatists and producers who felt they had to have a good holiday after doing one play. They should try doing three! And then pile on top of them all this other work! I have never before or since led such an existence. Too nervously exhausted and excited to sleep properly, I would often wake early in the morning, crawl out and do an hour or two's work, then start dictating replies to letters immediately after breakfast, see the morning's rehearsal at one theatre, argue with agents, managers, publicity men all through the lunch interval, attend the afternoon's rehearsal at another theatre, then look at contracts, bills, programme material, continue all the arguments of lunch time, absent-



mindedly eat a dinner that would soon decide to make me aware of itself, perhaps see more rehearsing or go home and do some work, finally, with eyes heavy and hot and a mind rattling round like an old Ford engine, retire to bed, only to remember fifteen important things that ought to have been done that day and would certainly have to be done in the morning. Nothing less than the certain salvation of the human race would justify such an existence, and until I am called upon to save my species I do not propose to work like that again. "Never mind," people said. "You'll have a nice rest on the boat." They forgot that within five days, which includes the bustling day of arrival and unpacking and the bustling day of packing and departure and three days in between of a most elaborately organised social life, the *Queen Mary* hurls you into New York. And in New York they have everything ready for you except a nice rest.

## V

HERE, I THINK, WE WILL HAVE A BREAK IN THIS chronicle, this *Where have I been and what have I done?*, and let the *Queen Mary* plunge and shudder and strike again at the angry October Atlantic while our attention is elsewhere. I began thinking about my correspondents. As my work changes, so they change. For two years after the publication of *English Journey*, it seemed that every man and woman in this island who had a scheme for saving it wrote to tell me so. Books, pamphlets, typewritten lectures, dissertations closely written on foolscap, came clattering and plopping into our letter-box. I had thought the English indifferent to the fate of their country. It now appeared as if every man jack of them had his own nostrum. These correspondents fell into various broad groups. There was first the remote fantastic prophet, the voice crying in the wilderness, who would indicate briefly that I was worthy to hear a little of his testament and would enclose a great slab of it. Next, and far more numerous, were the elderly theorists, pedantic and arrogant fellows, perhaps retired engineers or superannuated station masters, who would tell me that they had read my book with some faint interest

(much, I gathered, as I would read a child's school essay), that I had in me the making of an observant, thoughtful man, and that I deserved to be made acquainted at last with the truth about the whole matter, which they enclosed for my earnest consideration. Then there were my enthusiastic brother and sister reformers, who welcomed me warmly to their family circle, but made haste to put me right on several points. "You are really one of us," they cried, in effect, "but you don't understand yet." And along came Marxism, Social Credit, the Single Tax, Proportional Representation, Technocracy, Controlled Inflation, and Uncle Gold Standard and all. These had their sour converts too, who wrote to tell me that an hour's serious study of their particular theory would have prevented me from writing such rubbish. "Be a man!" they growled. "Learn the truth and proclaim it." The tide is ebbing now, but I still receive letters from members of each of these groups. Every newspaper article I write produces a sudden backwash, and once again the running sand is hidden by the spume and froth of conflicting theories.

After wading, not always without reward, through this tide of correspondence, I have arrived at two conclusions. The first is that, quite obviously, we are wrong to imagine, as we often do, that in this age of cars and wireless and cheap popular amusement all the people have stopped thinking about

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

political and economic problems. What has happened is that people now either do not think about these things at all, taking their opinions from the nearest newspaper, or they think a good deal about them. The difference between them and their grandfathers, I fancy, is that either they think more or they think less. And for a very good reason. The problems of to-day are at once so huge, so bewildering, so urgent that either you try hard to grapple with them or, appalled by their very magnitude, you give it up as a bad job. Nine out of ten, of course, whether in Western Europe or the United States, give it up as a bad job, swallow the nonsense of the moment, repeat the latest parrot cry. But the tenth can hardly think about anything else. My correspondence probably represents a good cross-section of these earnest strivers. Which brings me to my second conclusion. This is that in spite of the wide differences between them, they are all alike in this—that they are all wrong. They are like doctors who are treating as a mere skin-disease some deep-seated malady. They have not got down to the level at which the problems of our time can be properly examined. There is a serious time-lag between their thought and the events of our political, economic and social life. (All this, of course, is equally true of all our politicians, who are, indeed, further behind the events than most of my correspondents.) They are trying to apply the remedies of one world

to the ailments of another one, almost as if the British Medical Council should try to abolish a plague on Mars. All my correspondents—and I do not except the communists—seem to me to be thinking in the 19th Century, and unfortunately our lives have now arrived nearly at the middle of the 20th Century. Not that I pretend to be infinitely wiser than they are. But I have just enough wisdom to know that these desperate problems of ours have hardly been properly stated yet, that their roots are deeper than we think, and that if and when we do solve them it may be in what would seem to us now the most fantastic ways. Instead of its being a question of voting in this fashion and taxing in that, it is more likely to be a question of beginning to think all over again.

Ever since I published *Midnight On The Desert* and produced the two Time plays, I have had a new set of correspondents. The reformers gave place to the mystics. What is called "the lunatic fringe" looked up my address. Long letters, pamphlets, bad books and terrible manuscripts have been showered upon me. The most nonsensical accounts of the cosmos have been shot at me. Pseudo-mysticism by the hundredweight has been dumped on my doorstep. Hailed as a spiritual brother, I have been almost overwhelmed by New Thought that was neither new nor thought. Ladies who remembered being princesses in Babylon and queens in Thebes have

demanding an hour's intimate talk. Gentlemen acquainted with the innermost secrets of St. John, Boehme, Cagliostro and Madame Blavatsky have offered to reveal all. Astral planes and etheric spheres have been two-a-penny. The After Life, the Beyond, the World of Light, became the commonest geographical terms. Most of these letters, of course, were so much gas and gush. But one out of every three or four would have something in it—a thought, an intuition, an account of a dream, a record of some strange experience—that made it worth writing and reading. And there were scores of such letters. Many of their writers were obviously persons of high character and intelligence, and I felt that most of them were rather solitary folk, anything but given to gassing and gushing in chorus. Often they observed that never before had they mentioned to anyone the thought, the belief, the unaccountable experience. But somebody had to be told, and I, a stranger yet not quite a stranger, and safely at a distance, would do. The impression they left me with, in spite of all the other nonsensical stuff I was receiving, was that everywhere the school-and-textbook picture of our life, with which we begin our adult years, was being pierced by flashing arrows, arriving out of the darkness where they told us there was nothing. And where perhaps, too, you can hear laughter.

Because there exists this vast "lunatic fringe" and yet very near it, perhaps to our mistaken view inside

it, there are genuine ideas stirring, I felt all the time that I wanted to turn over this bulk of correspondence to some special society, organised for the purpose of separating astonishing facts from mere lunacy or self-deception. It would be a society of careful enquiry, not unlike that for Psychical Research (with whose activities it might often overlap) but with a wider scope. What it would offer us is real evidence, which is precisely what we lack now. For example, we are told that the advanced adepts of Yoga achieve powers quite outside our ordinary range, that they can withstand extreme heat or cold, travel the most astonishing distances without fatigue, see and hear at a vast distance, observe what the future holds, and so forth. If they can't, then let us have done with this humbug for good and all. But if they can, if all this and more is true, then let us admit at once that their understanding of life is immensely wider and deeper than ours. And once more, here is not a question of belief but of fact. Again, I have been told that the disciples of the late Rudolf Steiner, following some extraordinary principles of agriculture laid down by their clairvoyant master, have met with astounding success. We could all argue for years about Steiner's account of the cosmos and never reach an agreement, for one party could still say he was a prophet and the other party continue to declare him a wild charlatan. But agricultural experiments can soon be proved to be either

successes or failures. Even I, who know less about agriculture than anybody in the world, can tell the difference between a big pumpkin and a little pumpkin. And if these people, with their astrological sowing and reaping, have really produced the bigger and better pumpkin, then clearly we must widen our view of things to include Steiner's clairvoyant agriculture. And a society of the sort I have in mind could easily report on this and fifty other queer affairs.

We need expert assistance, giving us the facts, because I think most of us keep our minds either too open or too closely shut. One section of us, having arrived at a rough working view of things, refuses to enlarge this view at all. Anything that does not fit into the picture is hastily dismissed as a mere coincidence, a piece of self-deception, or a downright lie. There is to me something peculiarly irritating about the man who half-recognises some disturbing phenomena but refuses to admit them into his system; as if he was quite ready to explain this universe but that such strange phenomena belong to some other universe, which it is not his business to explain. Many scientists work this trick on us. If you try them with the Time problem, they say there is no problem and we are making a fuss about nothing. If you venture timidly to remark that we do occasionally catch a glimpse of events situated in their non-existent Future, they reply that these are mere



coincidences and anyhow they are not interested in this kind of thing. So the other section of us keeps the mind too open. It meets miracles and marvels more than half-way. Anything that does not fit into the picture is given a tremendous welcome. I confess that this is my own party. This may seem strange. I was brought up in a proverbially "hard-headed" community, and I am generally regarded as being a fairly sagacious fellow with any amount of common sense. Indeed, "shrewd" is the adjective used more than any other by my reviewers. I know myself better than they know me, and I would say that I am more intuitive than shrewd. My method is to observe closely and sharply and then guess, rather than to tabulate and reason. But my worst enemy would not call me a feather-headed gusher, ready to believe anything if it was silly enough. I think it is a kind of realism in me that has made me join the open-minded party. My profession compels me to examine in detail and to brood over my own experiences, for a writer's observation is turned inward as well as outward. If I find that the commonly accepted accounts of our life simply do not fit what I have observed of my own experience, then it would be most unrealistic and self-deceptive of me to pretend that they did or that they were trustworthy accounts. Then, moved by this dissatisfaction, if I find that all manner of truthfully recorded phenomena have been ignored, often deliberately ignored, by these neat

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

little explainers of everything, I have no alternative, as an honest man, but must join the open-minded enquiring party. In this I am supported too by the deep-seated conviction that mankind is about to acquire and to act upon a new kind of knowledge, a different vision of its destiny. This explains the state of the world, which is ending one epoch and beginning another. We are in the vast muddle of removal.

If you do try to walk a little way down one of these new paths in our jungle, you are in danger of being told that you are an "escapist." People whose every assumption has been proved to be false, whose minds have not been able to penetrate below the surface of any major problem, whose mental movement is circular like that of men lost in a desert or a forest, coolly tell you not to run away from the difficulties and dangers of your own age. This seems to me the crowning silliness of our time. I do not mean that there is not plenty of "escaping." (Incidentally, it is necessary for us all to do some escaping, and I have always held that in all good literature there is a certain satisfying balance of sharp criticism of our common life and an escape from it.) A passion for travelling at high speeds; the collecting mania; an utter absorption in routine work; that kind of interest in art in which you are, in Blake's phrase, "connoisseured out of your senses"; an overmastering concern for the forms as against the spirit, the

body as opposed to the soul, of life in the past; a constant over-stimulation of sex: these are all forms of escape. But to call an interest in new ideas, which promise to be of the gravest significance to humanity, a form of escape is to have no respect for language or for your readers' intelligence. Anybody who detects a personal warmth in all this is quite right. Referring contemptuously to my two Time plays, or to one of them (I forget which), an American columnist, Heywood Broun, dismissed their author, about whose work he must be completely ignorant, as one of "these escapists." It is this kind of supreme silliness, masquerading as penetrating criticism, that makes an author wonder if he is living in a vast madhouse. All of which has brought us safely if dubiously to New York.

## VI

EVERYTHING HAPPENED AS BEFORE IN NEW YORK. On arrival I was exhilarated; I could not sleep properly, began to feel tired, empty, desolated; and I was thankful to leave it. The city seemed more beautiful than ever, and the early fall weather was exquisite. To walk up Fifth Avenue in that sunlight and crisping air; to stand at the window, fourteen floors up, sipping an "Old-fashioned," watching the office buildings at dusk turn into Babylonian palaces; to saunter late in the cool night with a friend down the deserted concrete canyons—why, what more could a man want? Nothing, except to get out of it. I have a theory now that explains why I cannot sleep in New York and always feel mentally and spiritually exhausted there. It is a theory without the tiniest prop, so far as I know, of any scientific foundation. I believe there are too many people on that island of Manhattan. In no other place in the world are so many human beings crowded together. London has as large a population, but its people are spread thinly over an enormous area. In New York the people are packed in layers hundreds of feet thick. There are populations of fair-sized cities at various levels above your head, between you and the stars.

You are really surrounded by people in New York, cubically hemmed in. It is as if you were trying to live your life in the middle of a vast box of humanity. And my theory is that these new and fantastic conditions change your internal rhythm. We are not blocks of wood, to be lumped together in this fashion without effect. To begin with, we are dynamic creatures. We are electrical gadgets. We are moving radio sets. Then again, each of us has an invisible life. We carry about with us great unseen clouds of emotion. We pulsate with hope and fear. We trail, like fabulous brides, great shimmering lengths of dream. Our atoms dance to the music we hear in mad visions. Herd millions of us on to one small island, and keep on herding us until we are piled up in these monstrous layers—and there will be, must be, the devil to pay. And once again, I paid him.

How good it was, at the week-ends, to escape! In the country, where the leaves were ablaze again, the afternoons were as crisp as a nut. You felt that the tennis you played on such afternoons was like that of Vines and Perry. Why should the Americans ever trouble about vintage wines when they have such vintage air? What a huge beautiful mistake New York seemed, when Monday morning rushed round again! I went to many theatres, but remember nothing with pleasure except an odd song or two in an odd musical comedy called *Babes In Arms*, and one scene, a little love scene between a young couple

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

in a holiday camp, truly observed, written, acted, from a popular piece, *Having Wonderful Time*. As the author of two plays then running successfully in London, I was the quarry of nearly all the theatre managers—or “producers” as they call themselves in America—who had now developed a sudden passion for my work. This gave me no pleasure. One of the gravest weaknesses of theatrical life—and, of course, you find it too in the films—is its people’s worship of success. This word dominates the existence of all these people. It is written in great glittering letters across their very sky. *Wishing you another success* run the telegrams. “I hear you’ve got a big success,” they all cry. Success, success, success! Now you have it, and are a wonder man; now you haven’t it, and nobody cares tuppence about you. In this idiotic world of the Theatre, either you are Tamburlaine shaking the earth or you are poor Tom Fool sinking into obscurity and oblivion. Either they are all chasing you or they are all avoiding you. What nonsense it is! It is not in such a Monte Carlo atmosphere of bank-breaking or bankruptcy that good solid work can be done. Not until the Theatre is taken clean out of this atmosphere and brought into one of decent persistent effort, not until its people stop behaving like hysterical children and decide to grow up, not until it stops being a lottery with a few gaudy prizes and a heap of miserable blanks, will the Theatre take its proper place in a civilised

community. I have had as much of this success they talk about as I deserve, but I would give a good deal not to hear or see the word for the next ten years. Then we might make some progress in the difficult art of the drama.

Before joining my family in the West, I had my lecture tour to get through, so my wife and I had arranged to spend a few days together in New Orleans, which we had never seen, wanted to see, and knew was about equi-distant from New York and Arizona. Thus this romantic city seemed to offer us the perfect rendezvous. For me the trip did not begin well. I took a great dislike to the train journey from New York to New Orleans. I left early on Saturday afternoon. On Saturday evening, after we had passed Washington, everybody began coughing. That is all I have to record. In the pullman, the club car, the diner, they all coughed, and then I began coughing too. If I could find any deep significance in this you may be sure I would find it; but I cannot, and it must remain a simple fact: we coughed. Perhaps we were clearing our throats for the Deep South. Then followed one of the longest Sundays I ever remember. It was like a return to the interminable yawning Sabbaths of childhood. We ran through Georgia under a low blanket of cloud and then through Alabama in the rain. If there was anything to see, I missed it. The men's room was filled with men even fatter than myself; the books I had with me had

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

no more savour than the train's food; even dozing was hard work and seemed to consume no time at all. We were lotus-eaters clean out of lotus. I have crossed the Atlantic in what seemed a shorter time. When at last we crept into New Orleans it was not merely raining, it was pouring. The station was black and wet; all the porters had been drowned; and I lugged my two heavy bags through the drenching dark in search of a taxi. Next morning it was still raining. From our window in the St. Charles Hotel I could see an illuminated time signal, which pointed an arrow at each passing minute and seemed to be conjuring your very life away. The local paper told girls how to be popular at parties ("Don't be tongue-tied if he toasts you"), and when, in despair, I turned on the radio, it implored me to visit somebody's furniture shop. Dimly below shone the names of beers and cigars, but they were the usual standardised beers and cigars. The Yellow Cabs by the pavement's edge to me were Yellow Cabs and nothing more. Was this the wicked old witch of the South?

But then there came to my nose, from all over the city at once, the glorious smell of roasting coffee. And then the sun came out and the telephone began to ring. We met with much kindness and hospitality in New Orleans. We were drowned in Sazerac cocktails and smothered in delicious sea-food. If there is a city in England where a wandering American author and his wife would be instantly received with



such warm hospitality, I am afraid I do not know where it is. Led by the charming Roark Bradfords, the citizens of New Orleans nobly entertained us. If I did not see everything worth seeing, that was my indolence and not their indifference. We began, of course, by exploring the *Vieux Carré*, the old French Quarter. Antiquity is purely relative. I exclaimed at the wonderful great age of these houses, clean forgetting that I had two houses in England both older than any of these. The charm of these crumbling tiny mansions, with their patios and iron traceries, has not been exaggerated; although I did not like the atmosphere of the quarter itself, for there was something fusty, secretive, desolating, rather sinister about it. Perhaps I had been reading too many unpleasant old stories of the quarter, but the fact remains I never took to it. The flavour somehow was queer. But of the antique grace of the streets and houses there can be no doubt. The Creoles built with an air. Nowadays, except with our aeroplanes and ships and automobiles, we have to make a severe effort to escape ugliness. If we want something graceful and handsome, we have to call in special designers and empty our pockets. But when the Creoles were building Royal Street, if you ordered an iron balustrade, a staircase, a chair, the trade calmly tossed back at you a thing of grace and charm. The workmen laboured in a tradition and as the tradition was good, the work was good. This explains why you can eat

so superbly in New Orleans. The French have lived here and the French have a tradition of noble dining. The mysterious rich dishes they bring you at Antoine's, Galatoire's, Arnaud's or La Louisiane are not French and could not be obtained in Paris; they are as American as browned hash or deep dish apple pie; but the tradition behind them, like the ritualistic solemnity of the waiters, is French. When you eat (as you must) *huitres en coquille a la Rockefeller* or *pompano en papillote* at Antoine's, you are making the best of two worlds, the Old and the New; for though the raw materials are American, the artistry and tradition are French. Not only is the food of these New Orleans restaurants magnificent, but the rooms themselves, so square and plain and sensible, like the elderly waiters in their alpaca coats, are at once homely and charming, like a good old host. They represent New Orleans at its highest pitch. If all the city and its life were on the same level as its restaurants, what a place it would be! What wisdom and nobility there would be in its public life! What art it would produce! What philosophies and sciences! What exquisite women and astounding men! The Mississippi would go curling round another and greater Athens of the golden age. But alas—there is nothing in the city to compare with its best food, nothing it has accomplished is fit to be mentioned with its *huitres en coquille* or *pompano en papillote*. The spirit that

flames around its *crêpe suzette* is perhaps the noblest it has known.

It was, I think, that Girod Street cemetery (which my wife firmly refused to see) which made New Orleans go all wrong for me. The city is largely built on a swamp, so the dead are buried above ground, in vaults or sometimes in brick tiers that look like gigantic ovens. The old burying place in Girod Street is not really very old. The dates on some of the vaults are quite recent. But that cemetery will remain in my mind, haunt my imagination, as a symbol of decay and dissolution. I saw it on a sticky warm morning, when the very sunlight seemed to be soggy and have weight, and I could almost taste the place for days afterwards. It terrified me. This is not an exaggeration. I never remember before being in a place that produced in me such a feeling of loathing and horror. It was uncanny. I might have been murdered or buried alive there in some previous existence. My feeling, which did not disappear for days, was out of proportion with what I actually saw there, but what I saw was bad enough. Everything in that cemetery was crumbling and rotting away. The very marble, I will swear, was turning to a damp grey pulp. Many of the vaults were cracking and bursting open, as if some slow and grisly resurrection were taking place there. If a rotten hand had made feeble motions at me, I would not have been much surprised. Probably nightmare creatures were

feeding and breeding in the swampy soil beneath the vaults. A solitary midnight visit to that graveyard would be a test beyond my nerves. Poe would have been happy and creative in there. It had exactly the atmosphere, the elaborate pulpy rottenness, of his more characteristic charnel-house pieces. I could not help feeling that he and it belonged to the same world, and that it was not a world I knew or liked or wanted to explore more thoroughly. The House of Usher was still falling—or, rather, shredding away—there in Girod Street.

Call me a fanciful idiot, but I must confess that behind or mixed-in with everything I saw afterwards in or near the city were the flavour and atmosphere and general horror of that cemetery. We wandered round the solid American Quarter, built in the golden Fifties when this was the richest city in the Union; we looked at the newest garden suburb near Lake Pontchartrain, the heavily bearded oaks of Chalmette, the last river steamer moving with pomp down the surprisingly narrow channel of the Mississippi; we stared at the animals and birds in Audobon Park; we caught glimpses of some remaining plantation houses, white ghosts among sad dark-green foliage; we dined with charming citizens and discussed with them the local trade and politics, manners and literature, climate and scandal. But I could not put that cemetery out of my mind. This is a city and a part of the world in which everything ages

and decays at a frightful speed. A building fifty years old looks as if it were fighting a losing battle with the centuries. Gardens that were first made twenty-five years ago now look like antique wildernesses. The hothouse climate brings everything to a quick maturity and then condemns it to a shabby, sad, lingering death. At evening, outside the city, you see the sinister mists rising from the swamps. The sunsets are sudden, swollen, purple, as if the day had been suffering from a high blood pressure and had just had an apoplectic stroke. Men of our race find it difficult to thrive in such a climate. Our characteristic virtues cannot flower in this soil. The much-admired and elaborately mourned social life and culture of the Deep South was but another victim of this hot-house process. I read many first-hand accounts of this famous old life of the Deep South, which has been lamented so passionately, and did not find it impressive on this closer acquaintance. Before the outbreak of the Civil War, there came thirty years of great affluence, when there were miles of steamers alongside the wharfs of New Orleans, when slave labour and the rolling Mississippi together produced an annual golden harvest, when prosperity and leisure created a temporary aristocracy. But what did it all produce? What great works, what noble figures, can we remember it by? Consider the array of giants that Florence marshalled in her years of prosperity. We search the streets of New Orleans for

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

some remembrance of past genius—and find a chess player. Its famous Romance was simply a combination of the odd, picturesque and raffish: hot-blooded young men fighting duels over quadroon mistresses or swaggering in and out of the gambling hells or roaring brothels. There is little here to light up the imagination. Nor does the life that fed the city in that golden age offer us any more signs of greatness. These fortunate people in the great white plantation houses, surrounded by slaves, with wealth pouring in for several decades, seem to have created nothing but a doubtful legend of romantic gestures and easy living. The men were brave, the women pretty, and that seems to be the end of it. I read long extracts from the diary of one of these young gentlemen of the Old Deep South, a record of endless visits and “tip-top beaux” and “sweet and charming belles” and such stuff, and compared with any average lad now at Harvard or Yale he was a nincompoop. Reading him was like having a glimpse of the private lives of orchids and gardenias. How could such foolish, hot-house personages produce anything of value?

Yet they have done, for they have produced a legend. It was not until it suddenly died that that existence of theirs came to life. The Civil War, which ended it, really began it. Without that war, this life of the Old South, which was already beginning to fade and dwindle, would merely have died a miserable lingering death: but the war, condemning it to

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

public execution, turned it into a glorious ghost, a legend of yet another golden age. One morning, as I read in an old lady's letter, the young men in their uniforms marched down to the wharf to embark for the war; they were smothered in glorious red roses; the bonnie blue flag fluttered into the breeze; the women waved their sunshades and handkerchiefs; and as the boat moved out, the band played "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and in a few minutes the gay little tune had gone and the boat was out of sight, and it was all over, for the young men never returned, nothing returned: a whole era had perished. This same old lady, writing years later, describes her last visit to the plantation, at the close of the war, and now I will quote (from Lyle Saxon's delightful *Old Louisiana*) her exact words:

I went down the road, singing gaily to attract the negroes' attention, but only one cabin door opened and the old housekeeper came out to see me. She was the only negro left in the quarters; all the other cabins were empty. When I got to the big gate which led to the fields, I looked through, expecting to see the fields white with cotton, and the cotton pickers with their baskets. But there were no negroes, and there were no cotton fields lying snowy in the sunshine. Not a soul was in sight, and the fields were bare and brown. I turned and walked back to the house,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

blinded by tears of disappointment and sorrow.  
At the gate of the flower garden I met "Mammy."  
Her head was bent down and she was crying . . .

Notice how beautifully that is told. It is significant that no description she gives us of the plantation when it was bustling, wealthy, alive, compares with this account of its desolation and death. The lovely legend has begun. The light that never was on sea or land now begins to play on these cotton fields. Figures out of a dream, enchanting ghosts, bow and smile and move through the dance in these forsaken plantation houses. Dixie is born, to keep company with Cockaigne, Avalon with its unfading apple blossom, and the Isles of the Blessed. And now, nearly eighty years afterwards, in an armed and shivering world, the legend persists, so that in music-halls and night clubs negroes sing for a hundred pounds a week their routine numbers about the Old South, and the bookshops are piled high with cheap editions of *Gone With The Wind*.



## VII

I RETURNED TO NEW YORK, FOR I HAD TWO PUBLIC appearances to make there, one as a lecturer at Columbia University, the other as the introducer of a programme of English documentary films. Paul Rotha had brought over a collection of them, for the film library of the Museum of Modern Art, and this was to be their first show. He had asked me to say something about them because I had actually worked on one of them, a film with a Swiss background that I called *We Live In Two Worlds*. Most films are made by turning a narrative into a series of photographs. This film was made by turning a series of photographs into a narrative. In short, it was created backwards. About a year before, I had said to some interviewer that I could not see why the usual process could not be now reversed. The big studios have stock shots of every familiar sight, from the launching of a battleship to a cat cleaning her kittens, and they have sound tracks of all the world's noises, from a tiger's nocturnal roar to the Brahms clarinet quintet. Why not make a selection from these and build them up into a brand-new film? A week or two later, John Grierson, then head of the G.P.O. Film Unit and the great white chief of British documen-

tary films, came to me and said that after doing a short film for the Swiss Post Office they had a mass of good stuff left over—lovely shots of the Swiss peasants in the fields, and so on—and perhaps I could see my way into turning this stuff into a good lecture film. They could add a certain amount of new material for me, but it would all have to be done very economically. So on the basis of the list of shots supplied to me, I concocted a little talk about nationalism and the new internationalism of transport and communications, blandly took Switzerland as an example of both—for while it is ringed round with heavily guarded frontiers, it is also an excellent example of this new internationalism—and thanks to a very able director, Alberto Cavalcanti, we ended with an excellent little documentary film, which has, I believe, been quite popular. And anybody who would like to meet in a film a gigantic and apoplectic frog talking with a broad Yorkshire accent should have a look at me in *We Live In Two Worlds*.

Actually we live in many worlds. I entered a new little world when I helped to make this film. I had had some dealings with the ordinary British film industry. But this was quite a different world, this of the documentary film producers, directors and their assistants, whose social headquarters appeared to be a saloon bar just out of Soho Square. Even this was a pleasant change from the Savoy Grill, where the other film chiefs could be seen nearly every evening,

holding court like caliphs of Baghdad, and, indeed, bringing the Arabian Nights into modern London. Enormous sums of money were being handed over by the City, by those legendary "hard-headed" gentlemen who control our finance, to all manner of fantastic Central European characters, who had read with some profit Hans Andersen's story of the Emperor's new clothes. You could have successfully financed ten first-class repertory theatres on the money that was wasted on films not worth making or films that never were made at all. You could have run symphony orchestras and seasons of ballet and opera and scores of exhibitions of painting and sculpture on these gigantic and quite useless film subsidies. The City had about as much to show in the end as drunken sailors after a spree. And not a penny of this money went to the earnest and enthusiastic young men who were making our documentary films, in which branch of the art we were then leading the world. I had liked what I had seen of their realistic, non-fiction films—*Drifters*, *Song of Ceylon*, *Night Mail*, *Voice of Britain*, and the rest—and I liked the enthusiasm of these rather solemn young men in high-necked sweaters. Most of them worked like demons for a few pounds a week, for less than some imported film stars were spending on their hair and finger-nails. They were rapidly developing a fine technique of their own, so rapidly indeed that if you wanted to see what camera and sound really could do,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

you had to see some little film sponsored by the Post Office or the Gas Light and Coke Company. My own primary interests being in another direction, I could not quite echo the hushed solemnity of tone in which Grierson, Rotha and their followers pronounced the word *Film*, always giving it out in capitals or italics. But I much preferred the work they were discussing and organising, over ham-sandwiches and glasses of bitter in that saloon bar, to the vast spendthrift muddle, the tottering Folly, that was being crazily erected over *suprême de volaille* and magnums of Bollinger at the Savoy. Grierson and his young men, with their contempt for easy big prizes and soft living, their taut social conscience, their rather Marxist sense of the contemporary scene, always seemed to me figures representative of a new world, at least a generation ahead of the dramatic film people, who were really rather old-fashioned theatrical types, impresarios who had suddenly come into money and the full blaze of publicity.

Though I enjoy their documentary films, I do not agree with what they say about them. For they seem to imagine that in these elaborately designed moving pictures based on real life they have come nearer the truth than people working in any other medium, such as the printed word or the stage. But nearly all documentary films seem to me a very romantic heightening of ordinary life, comparable not to the work of a realistic novelist or dramatist, but to the picturesque

and highly-coloured fictions of the romancer. It is not the raw material but the treatment that counts. By the time these documentary directors have assembled all their splendid shots, cut them artfully, then added music and perhaps spoken verse, they have arrived at a total effect that is immensely entertaining, dramatic, even deeply moving. (I have rarely been so moved in a picture-theatre as I was simply by the recital of the names of the Mississippi tributaries in *The River*.) They have done all this—and I do not ask for more—but what they have not done is to fulfil their original claim. They have not been more nakedly truthful than the rest of us, working in our various mediums, could have been. For plain truth they cannot compete with the printed word. If a good documentary director set out to make a film about the steel industry or the life of a fishing village, and at the same time I wrote a book on the same subject, the film would be far more exciting, dramatic and moving than my book, but it certainly would not convey as much honest-to-goodness truth about the steel industry or life in a fishing village as my book would to any reasonably intelligent reader. The film cannot help dropping out all the dull passages, beautifying and heightening the rest, and then giving the whole thing a sort of glitter and excitement. What the documentary film producer is really saying is not, as he pretends, "I'll show you the truth about our ordinary life as nobody else has shown it", but something quite

different, namely, "Oh, you think the steel industry or life in a fishing village dull, do you? Well, now you'll see!" And so you do: you see something exciting and romantic. But go and enter the steel industry, live yourself in a fishing village, and your final and exactly truthful impression would bear no resemblance to the film. In short, their very medium compels these young men to be romantic in practice, no matter how realistic they may be in theory. They are really doing in their new art what Kipling was doing, forty years ago, in his very old art.

If those Arabian Nights caliphs could have left the Savoy Grill and these earnest young experimenters could have marched out of Soho Square, and both parties could have met, somewhere near Haymarket, then British films might have entered a new and glorious life. The caliphs could have provided the studios and equipment, the actors and technicians, and such knowledge as they possess of the dramatic art of the film. The documentary men could have contributed their enthusiasm, their zest for experiment, their social conscience, and their knowledge of the English scene, which you cannot acquire merely by waiting at Southampton for the arrival of Marlene Dietrich. The result would have been an immediate strengthening and *thickening* of the ordinary British film. Nearly all our films are much thinner in their social texture than the French films and the better Hollywood products. They seem to be taking place

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

in a kind of vacuum or in a tiny world peopled sparsely by a few anxious character actors. When they show us an England, it seems to have been taken from a few issues of the *Sketch* and *Tatler* and a collection of Christmas cards. Only the faintest dribble of real English life is allowed to trickle into most of our films, from which everything not of immediate entertainment value has been so carefully removed that most of the entertainment has vanished too. But, of course, I did not say anything of this on that platform in New York.

## VIII

IT WAS IN THE HOTEL AT KHARTOUM THAT I RECEIVED and replied to a cable about lecturing in America. If I had been in London I might have gone on refusing these offers to lecture, but when you are as far from familiar surroundings as you are in Khartoum there seems something almost homely and cosy about the notion of an American lecture tour. There are two versions of this lecturing business. According to many American journalists, what happens is that the moment any English writer achieves the smallest success, he persuades American lecture agents, the secretaries of women's clubs, various university deans and professors, that he can lecture and then cynically conjures hundreds of thousands of dollars out of hoodwinked American audiences. How the English writer does his persuading in the first place, we are not told. Perhaps he makes hypnotic passes with his monocle clean across the Atlantic. The second version, which is that of the English writer, is that American lecture agents are forever imploring us to go and talk to their audiences, so eager to see and hear us that life is almost unendurable to them without us. These fine men and women, we are told, are in urgent need of



our message. They will welcome us with open arms and enormous fees, less twenty per cent to the agency. We shall make, they say, a triumphant and majestic progress across the continent, like conquistadores of culture. Who could resist such an appeal? I could and did for many years, but the cable that found me in Khartoum—a very artful cable, saying that this was the last possible moment for me to say Yes—caught me very neatly. And now here I was, at the end of October, packing my bags in New York and occasionally breaking off to have another good stare at my itinerary.

The tour was not to last long, only a month, but because I had demanded that my twenty lectures should be crammed within these four weeks, this itinerary looked like a nightmare of travel. It was not my agent's fault. I had brought it on myself by crowding ten weeks into four. My agent said it could be done, but I noticed a certain look in his eye when he came to Pittsburg to hear my first lecture. He said he hoped I could sleep well on the trains; for his part he could sleep better on trains than he could at home. I told him I often slept badly at home and that on trains I slept still worse, in fact I could not be said to sleep at all. He was a man of an austere habit of life, this agent, and neither drank himself nor believed that other men should drink, but, nevertheless, he now bought a bottle of the best Scotch whisky to be had in that city and pressed it into my hands. It ought

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

to turn out all right, he said thoughtfully, for I looked a powerful kind of fellow. Then he left me—with my itinerary. It looked as if somebody had been trying to map the adventures of a crazy giant in seven-league boots, reeling round the Middle West. There was, for example, that nice little jump from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, which was pretty much like being told that after Danzig your next lecture would be at Avignon. I had to make a nice little dash from Ohio to Iowa and then back to Ohio again, which is much as if you left Hungary for Spain and returned to Hungary again. There were trains to be caught at all hours of the day and night. True, I might have done a few of the journeys by air, but it was hardly worth risking because if a plane was delayed by bad weather my whole fantastic itinerary would collapse. So for these next four weeks I seemed to live only in Pullman coaches, from which I was let out at irregular intervals to shake the hands of innumerable pleasant strangers, to address large audiences, and to try and find somewhere in my gigantic aching head the answers to all the questions that were fired at me. At one small university town it was part of my contract that I should arrive in the place before noon, although I did not lecture until the evening, and in order to keep my word—or, rather, my agent's word, for I had not even noticed this monstrous clause—I had to change trains twice during the night and had no sleep at all. I was about a week

behind, anyhow, with my sleep, so that I arrived in this town reeling with weariness, only to discover that not only had I to attend a large luncheon, but that I was expected to answer scores of questions—on the state of the world, the condition of English literature, the progress of America—during the hour that followed lunch. If these good people, who meant no harm, found me brusque or stupid during that cross-questioning, I hope they will accept this explanation. In the large cities, where I was lecturing under the auspices of the universities, there was little to do but deliver the advertised lecture, usually to very large and intelligent audiences, but in the smaller and more remote places there is a tendency to regard the lecturer as a continuous entertainer and entertaineé and to treat him accordingly. If these smaller places should retort that they have a reputation for hospitality and that they do not expect their lecturers to be half-dead with fatigue, I can only blush with shame and retire.

I do not think I have ever felt so far removed from any sensible reality as I did during all this month. This was not the fault of the pleasant and hospitable people to whom I seemed to be forever saying *Hello* and *Good-bye*. It was my own fault for trying to do too much in too short a time. Yet this idiocy had a certain dashing and almost romantic quality about it that secretly appealed to me. To spend months and months solemnly lecturing and slowing moving on—

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

never! But to cram it all in one mad month; to travel thousands and thousands of miles, as I did; to be whirled through the darkness of unknown countryside nearly every night; to be driven in the small hours to mysterious railway junctions; to be shot out into towns that seemed as remote as Arabia; to be a one-man high-speed circus—well, there was a certain idiotic satisfaction in all that. There was the authentic romance of distance and unknown spaces in that itinerary. I could not imagine, from these strange names, what my audiences would be like. Somehow, after travelling hard for a day and a night, I expected them to be quite different, and somehow they never were. Not that they were absolutely all alike. There was only one I really disliked and that was in a smallish, cranky, puritanical town, where nobody was allowed to drink or smoke or eat meat or produce children or do anything. They were not only the gloomiest people I talked to (as well they might be) but also the stupidest. I may have been prejudiced—for though I can respect if not imitate the ascetic, I very much dislike the puritan—but it seemed to me that the more narrow-minded and puritanical the community, the duller my audience was. In the great wicked cities, they were all eager, quick, appreciative. And always much more considerate. What was wrong with most of the others was not that they did not smoke and drink with me, for I do not care tuppence whether people do or not, but that they were the kind

of fellows who had submitted to these intolerable restrictions on their personal liberty. They were poor fish.

The places and their people were often surprising. For example—Tulsa, Oklahoma. I gathered that this was in the wilderness. Way down in Oklahoma retired bad men lived side by side with Indian oil millionaires. I would dine off pork and beans out of a can and some raw corn whisky, lecture in some shack to about fifty gaping old-timers, and then be literally shot out of town. It was not like this at all. Tulsa is a handsome, spacious, brand-new city. Many of its very modern houses had been designed by my host, a Scots architect, whose wife, of Dutch extraction and an uncommonly well-read woman, had charge of these lectures. (If you can see this Scots-Dutch couple, in their very modern house, on the outskirts of a city that was a mere dump thirty years ago, you can also begin to see what America is up to. It is a new mixture in a new climate and landscape; a new civilisation. I asked my Scots host if he ever wanted to return to the old country. No, *sir!*) They had a pleasant circle of friends, and the audience was one of the best I had. It must have been very good because I addressed it in the morning and liked it even then. I was down to lecture at the oddest times, but the morning ones were the worst. If you want to test the sincerity of your views, try lecturing on them to two thousand people, after you have been travelling all

that night and several nights before, at eleven on a bright morning. I began and ended my tour believing every word I said in my lectures; I could not have gone to all that trouble to repeat a lot of nonsense; but there were times in the middle of the tour, when I seemed a long way from anywhere, when those nights behind the Pullman green curtains were beginning to wear me down, when I would simply hear my own voice going on and on, and felt like a big, fat, hot-eyed parrot. Then, perhaps for hours and hours, and even whole days and nights, a terrible melancholy would descend upon me. The schoolboy fun of dashing about the Middle West would shrivel and vanish. There was no fun left in being in America at all. Instead of seeing it as the beginning of some tremendous new civilisation, which I do indeed believe it to be, I would see it as many Europeans do, as something only superficially impressive, youthful and fresh only at a deceptive first glance, already at heart stale and sterile. At such moments, the men who hawked and spat in the train smoker would look prematurely old, and their women, forever staring at themselves with anxious eyes and daubing more paint on, would seem hard but brittle creatures. The food would seem tasteless or too sugary. (I have had dinners in the Middle West in which every course was really a sweet course, with not a sharp savoury taste in it anywhere.) In every train I would then see just the same people, and in my boredom and misery I would try to read

those immensely sophisticated (the term is theirs, not mine) New York periodicals, would find not one true word in all their silly cynicism, and would curse their editors and contributors as a pack of spoilt adolescents, throw the things down, and stare out of the window at the vast, meaningless, forlorn and unhomely landscape. What was I doing there? These people, to whom I was now crawling across the mad map, would far rather hear Dale Carnegie, the author of *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, which was then selling by the ton. They applauded me, but next week they would applaud, with equal fervour, the bogus Hindoo mystic or the only boy who went to Bali on a bicycle or one of those Russian ex-princesses who knew Rasputin. And they would all prefer, only they hadn't the courage to admit it, a pack of performing animals. Why was I there? Because I was a fool.

It was not a few night journeys and American audiences that brought me so low. Actually the tour was very hard, but the trouble was that it came after a summer's overwork in the London Theatre. I had not had one quiet, sensible week for months and months. And though if I am sufficiently interested I can toil at one thing and another from early morning until nearly next daybreak, I am not economical of nervous energy, but spend it recklessly, especially in the Theatre. It was chiefly this ebbing vitality, on which I still had to make enormous demands—for to

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

hold large audiences for an hour and a quarter, and to do it by discussing ideas new to most of them, is no joke—that occasionally made me feel so lost and melancholy. In this phantasmagoria of trains and auditorium platforms and campuses and coffee-shops and the unwinding brown ribbon of autumnal landscape there was no foothold of reality. The days and nights did not march steadily past; a morning did not shape itself into that familiar bridge between breakfast and lunch; evenings shrank to a few dazzling points or began to swell terribly; there were afternoons in stuffy club cars or in those men's rooms in the Pullman haunted by dead cheap cigars, or of waiting about in stations that had not a book for sale but only the magazines you had just thrown away, there were afternoons, I say, that did not belong to our age at all, but brought their immense dim trailing length from other ages, from tribes migrating inch by inch across deserts or from East Indiamen becalmed in the Arabian Sea. I had written and now was talking about Time and dreams, and for days and nights on end Time behaved as in dreams. My consolation then was to brood over a play I meant to write as soon as I came out into daylight again, joining my family in Arizona, and it was a play in which an apparent phantasmagoria would, if all went well, be given a deep and very moving significance. Odd lines and fragments of scenes would drift into my mind as I sat huddled in my Pullman chair, with Ohio and



Indiana, Missouri and Illinois, pulling their burnt plains and sullen hills past the window. And if I have for this play, which soon came to be called *Johnson Over Jordan*, a special tenderness, one reason for that is its companionship during this sad jumble of days and nights.

But, of course, I was not always so withdrawn, for often my drafts for new vitality were miraculously met, the kindness and the eager attention of these Mid-Western folk would act as restoratives too, and then I would be alive to the massive changing scene. Most of it has gone from my memory, for there was too much all at once, and if I am not travelling deliberately as a reporter of the scene I do not easily remember. But even now I cannot forget the glorious fall weather at the beginning of the tour, when the sunlight lay heavy on the broad land. I remember the rivers, from the Susquehanna to the Missouri, lending in English eyes a majesty to the countryside. And the strange brown mounds of the Ozarks, like a vast crumpled rug, on an afternoon of clear sunshine. And the hundred leagues farther north of hogs and corn-stalks and farms all cosy under the hill. I shall not forget returning from my lecture in Chicago, coming down from North-Western University, on a night that had both mist and ice in it, and suddenly seeing high towers that had no base, floating Babels, vertical palaces rising out of smoke and steam, and not caring then that I was tired and it was bitterly

cold, but standing there enraptured and crying out that this one glimpse, so mysterious and romantic, a dark Valhalla, was more beautiful than anything I had admired in New York. I remember how soon the Indian summer seemed to pass into winter; the colour draining out of the landscape; the country suddenly hardening and tightening; and then the coming of the snow. I remember, with a gratitude equal to that I feel towards the kind folk everywhere in those parts, the American air. If I revived so often and so quickly, it was not food or drink or rest that did it, but the miraculously tonic air. I would crawl out of the hot and exhausted train wondering how I should get through the evening's long programme, but even a few gulps of that air, between the station and the hotel, would bring me to life again. Nature has given America unpleasant extremes of heat and cold, floods and droughts, dust-storms, blizzards, tornadoes, but as a recompense these states have a perpetual supply of this vintage and restorative air. I do not know the secret of its quality. But I live to testify to its possession of its medicinal power. If the Middle West were only small enough to walk over, what a lecture tour a man might have there!

It was in the town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that I found a fellow-lecturer, laid up in a nursing home. It was Gerald Heard, who had been going round with Aldous Huxley, doing a double turn, and had slipped on the ice and injured an arm and shoulder. I went

gingerly up the icy streets, slippery as glass, and called to see him. We talked the morning away like a pair of wrecked sailors suddenly meeting on their island. He asked and I told him about my two Time plays, He and Huxley and I were all contemporaries, but we were all three very different types, different in temperament and capacity and background, yet now, as we agreed that morning, Heard with his *Third Morality*, Huxley with his *Ends and Means*, and I with my *Midnight On The Desert* and the Time plays, were all moving in the same direction. I hoped then that they were returning to England, but after their lecturing was over they settled in Southern California and have since been lost to us. But probably it is more important that two such brilliant fellows, both of them a fount of ideas, should remain in America, which badly needs men of their kind, than that they should come back to a rapidly changing and rather indifferent England. And one thing is certain. No Englishman would remain in America throughout a succession of European crises merely for his peace of mind, because it was my experience that the news of these crises, as expressed and amplified by the American newspapers and radio services, were far more disturbing there, thousands of miles from the scene and any accurate information about it, than they are here in England. It is to escape the dull weight of our normal life here, and not our crises, that I would choose to go to America.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Among the hundred and one topics I discussed so eagerly with Heard was the definite reaction people had to these new theories of Time. Having devoted part of a book, two plays, and many hours of this lecture tour to these theories, I knew something about their effect upon people, and I had noticed that they seemed to divide people quite sharply into two distinct classes. Over and over again, with critics, readers, playgoers, lecture audiences, I had remarked this division. One set is composed of persons who are immediately interested, often excited, and who nearly always seem to have given these Time problems some consideration themselves, but have probably felt too shy even to mention them to anybody else. I have watched their faces light up, almost as if they were exiles suddenly hearing their own language spoken again. I have tried to answer their eager questions. They have written me very long and painstaking letters, to try and formulate their own theories. They have demanded, by word of mouth, post and telegraph, lists of all the books in which they might find these problems discussed. If they have been playgoers, they have gone back to the theatres week after week. The other people are not merely indifferent but immediately hostile. They are apparently irritated by any suggestion that our ordinary conception of Time is unsatisfactory. If pressed they soon begin to lose their temper. Many of them have, in the ordinary way, liberal and speculative minds. It is not

that they do not wish to be disturbed by a new idea. They may welcome new ideas. But not about Time. You can almost hear them telling you to leave the damned thing alone. And what makes this sharp division very odd is that you can find no basis for it except a fundamental difference of feeling about Time itself. One party is not older or younger, better or worse educated, more or less intelligent about other things, richer or poorer, more masculine or more feminine, more conservative or more rebellious, than the other party. You cannot tell in advance how a person will react. About no other subject, not even psycho-analysis in its earlier and more controversial days, do I ever remember noticing so marked and seemingly quite arbitrary division among people. It is as if, beneath all other differences, there is this difference about Time, separating people into two secret nations. If you belong to one of them you will refuse to the very end to question your easy belief, as if you realised that below it was another belief, whispering to you not to pull aside the mask of the clock-face because there might be worse behind it. If you belong to the other secret nation you have doubted and questioned and brooded probably since childhood, as if you half-remembered some existence in which Time was not like that, some other world where the clocks had many strange faces, some of them very beautiful.

My last lecture was at the university at Lafayette,

Indiana. I hope my hosts, whom I remember to be specially kind, will forgive me if I admit that I no longer have any clear picture of this university as distinct from several others I visited. By now I have in my head a composite picture of a large Middle-Western university. I see myself arriving at a smallish station, being met by two or three pleasant young fellows, who drive me through an uninteresting town to where the university looms on the hill. We cross an enormous campus, like a young battlefield. I am shown the hall in which I shall speak, which is usually the big hall of the union building. It looks about the size of Waterloo Station. This union building is buzzing and crackling with students of both sexes, who are playing basket-ball or the piano, practising tap-dancing, painting scenery, eating ice-cream and looking at *Life* and *Time*. There are thousands of them. Then there is always a keen spectacled girl who interviews you for the university magazine. There is nearly always a sort of demi-god-like young man, who is the captain and leader of everything. When you walk round with him, the honours are divided. He is secretly in awe of you, and though he knows nearly everything he does not know that you are secretly in awe of him too. He hands you over to a member of the faculty, who takes you to dine with the president or the dean or whoever it is. The trouble about this dinner, which is probably excellent, is that it comes too early in the evening,

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

for at six-fifteen you are not hungry, and even if you were, you would not stuff yourself before lecturing. Because this is a closed little community, with its own intrigues and scandals and politics and excitements, you have the feeling that although you are an Event you are not very real and important to these people; although they ask you questions and would be delighted if you held forth, especially about people, Great Names, for that is what they really miss out there, not ideas, which they can find in books, nevertheless, the real urgent life of the dinner-party, of which you catch frequent glimpses, swirls all round you, but does not touch you, for you have no part in it. The people themselves vary, of course, but I have a composite picture of them too. First, your host and hostess, very grand, very solemn, and a bit inhuman, not because they are really like that, but because they are overdoing the occasion. Then there is usually some dean or professor of senior rank who thinks he is as good as, if not better than, the host, and so to show us that a dinner at the president's does not impress him, he talks in a loud confident tone in a waggish style. If his wife does not adopt the same tactics, then she is usually a grim silent woman, whose every glance is a complete and damning inventory of the whole room. Then there are several safe dependable senior members of the faculty, nice dullish men, with vaguely apologetic wives who have all had their hair done that afternoon by the same

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

assistant and so look more alike than they really are. Of these the only couple that stands out is the one—and there always is one—that went to Europe last summer. Then among the younger guests there is the Rebel-Who-Will-Not-Be-With-Us-Much-Longer, and indeed there was probably some discussion as to whether he should be invited to-night. (It is with him that you have already made a secret pact to meet after the lecture and drink a little Scotch and talk treason.) And there is nearly always one younger wife who is prettier and livelier and less amenable to discipline than the rest and is thought to be no better than she should be. If she should be the wife of the Rebel, then you may assume they will be thrown out very soon. To counterbalance the Rebel is the still-younger assistant professor who has worked like mad and agreed with everything anybody has ever told him, has nearly ruined his eyesight and poured out his youth as if it were dish-water, just to be a member of this faculty and to attend such dinner-parties and to agree eagerly and catch the president's eye. His wife, a dim girl, is nearly fainting under the importance of the occasion. And throughout the dinner, you are thinking that these are very nice people, but that it is a pity they are so dull and pompous and humourless and that there is so little fun in them. And most of them are wondering why the British are so heavy and pompous and humourless and go through life with so little sense of fun. The table is weighty,



not only with chicken and salad and layer cake, but also with the gravest misunderstanding.

My feelings about these universities and state colleges of the Middle West—and I am excluding such a university as that of Chicago—are at once absurdly and profoundly mixed. It is not difficult to dislike them. They are, to my mind, entirely without charm. Because they are very large institutions, their scale is impressive and many of their buildings are spacious, but the total effect has not a glimmer of charm. This is equally true, I think, of the life inside them. They are factories of higher education rather than the guardians of the pure flame of scholarship. It is hard to admire their hotch-potch of subjects. Their professors are conscientious rather than brilliant men. I do not like the rather dreary puritanism of their official outlook. It is not truly civilised, any more than the stupid antics of boys and girls who suddenly break through this repression are civilised. There seems a sad lack of wit, gaiety, intellectual high spirits and, what is more important, intellectual and moral *courage*. As a stranger from far away, I will confess that the thought of spending the next few years, in any capacity, at one of these institutions would drown me in despair. But that does not prove I am a fine fellow. It may be a weakness in me that makes me turn away from such places, towards any kind of life that has more charm and colour. It may not be difficult to dislike these new colleges of the great central plains, but

it is very hard for any intelligent visitor to regard them with anything but the deepest respect. They have no charm, but then they are beginning their cultural life and not ending it. They are ploughing the stubborn fields. The harvest will not come for years and years, but when it does, as it must unless some terrible economic catastrophe overtakes the whole Middle Western community, it will be of such a magnitude that it will change world history. These universities are not handling a picked few, but are taking annually whole army corps of lads and girls, from tiny towns and scattered farms, and turning them for a year or two into students. Once you grasp the size and scope of this cultural venture, see these laboratories and libraries and lecture halls and little theatres against the dusty ocean of prairie, your criticism sticks in your throat. After you have travelled across these dark leagues, which were a wilderness less than a hundred years ago, you see these lighted buildings round the campus as a beacon. Many a time as these lights came on in the vast blue dusk and I caught glimpses of scores of young faces and heard that symphony of college sounds, pianos and half an orchestra somewhere and whistles and calls and voices everywhere, I felt suddenly and deeply moved. Here I was, far away from home, lost in this vast land mass, seeing at last the people—not this favoured group or that, but the *People*—coming out of their long sleep. All this is only a beginning. Any cultivated Western

European, with his neat little bag of culture, can point to features of it that he could easily improve, but if his scorn goes an inch below the surface, then he proves himself to have no imagination. These people can learn from any travelling lecturer. But there is no travelling lecturer who cannot learn something from them. We imagine that it is what is happening in Western Europe that is important, that the future historian will stare, as we do, at the dictators and their armies. But it is possible that the rise of these universities of the plains will appear far more significant. The great movements of our time may not be recorded on the front pages of newspapers. And here is one of them. There is another in Russia, where on similar vast plains new periodicals and books are being printed and distributed by the million. And another in the remote interior of China, in provinces we have never heard the names of, where professors and students are re-organising lectures and classes, re-establishing whole universities, out of the reach of the invading Japanese. America, Russia, China: it is now the turn, you see, of the people of big countries; it is a renaissance of gigantic populations; and on these plains, east and west, the beacon lights of learning go up, there is a buzz, a stir, then a forward march, and at last the people are being taught to read and write and, let us hope, to think.

Some time past midnight, at Lafayette, I was escorted to my train by some cheerful young pro-

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

fessors, climbed on to the monster, which looked bigger than ever in the dark and quietness, waved a farewell to Lafayette and all lecturing, and popped behind my green curtain. In the morning I was in St. Louis, a city I kept arriving at and departing from without ever seeing properly. In the afternoon I was at Kansas City, where I had to wait several hours for my train to the West. It was there, in the station at Kansas City, that I first fully realised that my lecturing was over, I was on my way to my family in Arizona, and I could breathe again. An enormous sense of accomplishment, well-being, deep peace, descended upon me as I sauntered about that station. I had gone clean through that fantastic itinerary and was now out at the other side. This thought gave a luxurious ease to every small movement I made. When I lit my pipe, I tasted one part tobacco to three parts of freedom. But why, you may ask, was I loitering in the station. To understand that you must learn that the station at Kansas City is no ordinary station. I will quote a short passage from one of the booklets of my favourite railway company, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé:

Greater Kansas City is second largest railroad centre in United States. Has Union passenger station erected at cost of \$50,000,000, which sum also includes land, tracks and terminal construction. Main building cost \$6,000,000; it is 510 feet long

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

by 150 feet wide and rises 125 feet above the plaza; the grand lobby is 242 by 103 feet, and the waiting-room wing 410 by 160 feet, with room for 10,000 passengers at one time; the train sheds are 1,370 feet long and cover platforms for 16 tracks; 274 passenger trains arrive and depart daily, and more Pullman tickets are sold here annually than in any other station in U.S.A. . . .

If you think there is no romance in that paragraph, then that is because you have never been to the South-West. Actually it shines with romance; there are members of my family who would be hardly able to read it for tears. The name of this station should be *Open Sesame*, and do not forget that it opens to 410 by 160 feet and there can be 9,999 other passengers there besides yourself. The fact is, this fabulous station really *is* Kansas City. There is no point in going outside it. If people in Kansas City want to give a dinner-party outside their own homes, they all troop down to the station restaurant. You can shop extensively there too: books, tobacco, flowers, candy, toys, clothes, fruit, all the luxuries. You can stroll round the grand lobby, looking at this and that, have an "Old-fashioned" at the bar, then go for another walk, this time round the waiting-room wing. I had seen this station before, of course, but then I had been in no mood to cope with it, just one harassed traveller out of thousands in the second largest railroad centre

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

in the United States. But now, having put on two successful plays at once in London and arranged for the production of yet a third, having completed plans for their production in New York, having grappled with and triumphed over the most terrible itinerary in the history of lecture tours, having accomplished all this in four months and kept some remnants of sense and bodily functions, I was the man for whom this main building had been designed and erected at a cost of six million dollars. For me they had raised it a hundred-and-twenty-five feet above the plaza. I felt at that moment a hundred-and-twenty-five thousand feet above all plazas. And now, looking back with a glance that has more irony than regret in it, I can see myself there, a balloon filled out with the gas of vain accomplishment.

They made one mistake when they spent their millions on that Kansas City Union Station. They put in marble and granite and steel, but they forgot to place prominently in the grand lobby a little bit of wood for me to touch—or, as the Americans say, to “knock on.” Perhaps a bit of wood might have saved me. The virtue is not, of course, in the wood, but in the sudden shrinking of the ego’s self-approval when you compel yourself to perform this ancient rite. The gods are not waiting to trap proud humans who will not touch or knock on wood. But there may be something in the inward flow, to which the outward pattern of events must correspond, that moves away from an

ego that is swelling, unchecked, with self-approval. A sudden halting and shrinking, there clean in the middle of this swelling triumphant mood, might have saved everything. As it was, somewhere in the innermost regions, a tide turned against me, the baleful stars rose in the ascendant, and bright Fortune wandered away. Just as everything had gone right, now everything began to go wrong. The luck—for we must still keep this term, and what went wrong were the things outside my control—the luck, I say, began to drain out. I did not know it then, for I was riding too high to know anything, but within a week or so I could feel it in my very bones. The next sixteen months, right up to this very morning, were a procession of disappointments, losses and sudden hard blows. Not only did the small fortune, which we counted on coming to us from London and New York dramatic royalties and the sale of film rights, fail to arrive, but further losses multiplied themselves, so that the man who swaggered round the grand lobby that evening was a good deal richer than I am now. But not, I trust, in everything. And twenty-four hours after leaving Kansas City, I had forgotten about plays and film rights and lectures, for now the mountains and the deserts were round me again, and in the morning the sun would seem to make the world anew, and on the tiny platform at Wickenburg, with the glittering rock and the amethyst peaks high above them, would be the smiling faces I know best.

## IX

**B**ECAUSE MY FAMILY WERE THERE, ALL HAPPY, AND because I had already written so much about it, I came back to this Arizona country almost like coming back home. Though still wildly different from anything I had ever seen anywhere else, it no longer seemed strange. It was one of the good sensible places now, there to comfort a man's heart. There were not many changes, though Wickenburg itself had grown a bit and smartened itself up and was no longer the scrap of the old wild South-West it had first appeared. There were not so many picturesque old-timers about, and the young men at the new large filling-station wore neat uniforms and looked, as they do everywhere in the West, solemn, anxious, spotless, like acolytes. The ranch had not changed, though most of the guests were strangers to me. My little shack on the bank of the invisible Hassayampa had been restored to its former modest order for me, and looked as if I had been away from it only a day or two. After the ceaseless noise and confusion of the last three months, the very sight of its little table and attendant chair made my mind and fingers itch to be writing again. And very soon I was, only interrupted by occasional days when we all went on picnics or tried to climb a neigh-



bouring peak. Now and then we played some sketchy tennis on a court that was dazzling in the afternoon sun. In the evenings after dinner I seemed to be always playing ping-pong or banging out, by special request, *The Lady Is A Tramp* on the piano. But I settled down and worked well at the play I had been meditating throughout my lecture tour, *Johnson Over Jordan*, but as I have written at some length about this play in an essay in the reading edition of it, I need say no more here. Restored to my family and a sensible life, no longer badgered by managers and agents and reporters, eating at meal-times and sleeping at bed-times, warmed by the Arizona sunlight and healthily cooled by the chill crisp nights, I felt a nobler human being and tried to write like one.

I remember that there came into my hands, to my great comfort, the fine volume on *Pieter Brueghel the Elder*, published by the Hyperion Press in Paris. This book contains reproductions in colour of all Brueghel's major works. He had long been one of my great favourites, and years before this I had imported from Germany some large and very faithful reproductions of his better-known pictures, such as the "Peasants' Wedding" and the lovely green "Hunters in The Snow." Now I had the whole of him, snugly under my hand, there in Arizona, which has perhaps everything a man needs except the arts and a decent cigar. With old Brueghel, a grand quivering lump of art had

arrived. I found him even more important than I had imagined before. He is an artist for our times, speaking clearly from his turbulent century to ours. We can learn a lot—or at least I feel that I can—from this old Flemish painter. He is not an artist for gentlemanly connoisseurs, which probably explains why in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* he is dismissed in about five idiotic lines. He does not create a charming little refuge for sensitive but rather tired souls. He is an artist from and to the people. His art is not aristocratic but essentially anonymous and democratic, what films would be if they really were works of art and not products of a cynical industry. If I were an ambitious film producer or director I should have many a good look at Brueghel. (You may see him in many of the angles and patterns of *La Kermesse Héroïque*, but here his influence is rather superficial, for obviously he was chosen because he belonged to the right place and the right period. This is not what I have in mind.) And we writers, if we do not wish on the one hand to whisper to a few, or on the other hand merely to tickle the mob, could find in him an inspiration. He had as we have a desperate, foundation-cracking world as his scene and background. Then as now in man's spiritual life the seas were dark and heavy and the steering-gear had nearly gone. There was still colour and gaiety in the foreground, but in the background it looked as if doomsday were breaking. In this world,

a little ancestor of ours, Pieter Brueghel painted his peasants. But there is no patronising *genre* nonsense about him. He is not going round the slums with a handful of soup-tickets. These folk, nearly always sharply foreshortened, are humanity, all of us. Their local dress and customs are merely accidental. People have to be wearing and doing something. But these pictures are not simply a nicely-coloured note on the habits of the ordinary Flemings in the middle of the 16th century. Good design plus historical interest does not make a great painter, and Brueghel seems to me, though I may be prejudiced by some temperamental affinity, a very great painter indeed. To begin with, his form and colour, his pattern and rhythm, give you æsthetic pleasure. Some artists and critics seem to think now that this is not only the beginning but also the middle and end of the whole matter, but I cannot accept this view nor much enjoy the art it has produced. Granting the fine technique, we must now discover what happens after that. With Brueghel a great deal happens. The world he reveals, to my delight and I hope to yours too, is very rich and complicated, and in my opinion it is peculiarly satisfying because it combines three different appeals. It is realistic. Here are hundreds of real people, going about their business and pleasure with enormous zest and energy. You know what they are up to, and exactly what kind of day it is. The seasonal atmosphere is terrific; the winter scenes freeze you, and the brooding

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

heat of high summer fairly trembles on the canvas. So far, then, an excellent peep-show effect. Here is life, down to the last button, as the painter knew it. But when you look again—and you are nearly always compelled to look *down* on the scenes, as if you are floating in the air just above them—you now discover that a kind of magical element has found its way into this world. The people have an elfin look. Somewhere just round the corner is a fairy-tale country. We are poised on the edge of marvels and miracles. In the foreground are quaint antics in Flanders, but in the far background where rivers wander among blue conical hills are the misty borders of dreamland. Beyond the skaters on the green ice in the famous winter landscape are frozen peaks that you feel must guard the palace of the Snow Queen. This is not a plain realism, then, but a realism merging into the magical. And as you stare again, feeling a trifle haunted, the realistic-magical turns into the symbolic. I am not referring now to the obviously didactic quality of some of the paintings, many of which were actually done to illustrate proverbs or designed, probably for financial reasons, as sermons in paint. Indeed, I find more of this symbolism in the pictures of the peasants and of the seasons. It is as if the realistic-magical scene, so definitely patterned and exquisitely coloured, turned into an heraldic design, into one coat of arms after another for the vast anonymous crowd of struggling, sweating, dancing,

dreaming human beings. There is a glimpse of some other and more enduring world than this. There is a meaning but it cannot be fully realised here, which is what Blake, whose work was all symbolism, meant when he said: "The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man." And notice, too, in Brueghel how so many of the details, sharply observed and recorded, are comic, but that the total effect is beautiful and faintly tragic. Which is how most of us should see life, and, if we are writers, record it. I see then in this Flemish painter of four hundred years ago a great artist with a broad appeal of the popular, tragi-comic, democratic kind, showing the crowd a vision of their own life; and those of us who ask to do nothing better than this, for we cannot see that there is anything better to do, whether we are painters, authors, producers of plays and films, should turn to him for refreshment and confirmation. As I did with this book in Arizona, though the result, even with the best of luck, may not be visible for a long time.

We had not originally arranged to stay in America all the winter, but now for various reasons it seemed absurd to return home. One daughter, however, did not want to miss another term at school, and so we agreed that she should go home. Another daughter wanted to spend a week or two with friends in New York. *Time and the Conways* was to be produced in

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

New York just after Christmas. A friend was coming out from England to join us some time in January. So my wife and I and the two girls left the ranch in the late afternoon of Christmas Day, which was the very latest we could leave, and we had the train that runs from Wickenburg to Ashfork to ourselves, hob-nobbed with the conductor, and were given a very good dinner. At Ashfork we caught the *Chief* and in Chicago the *20th Century*, and within three days of eating our pudding at the ranch we were cosily installed at the Algonquin. I had often eaten at this famous New York hotel, but had never stayed there before, chiefly because I had been warned that it was noisy. We did not find it any noisier than any other New York hotel, but what we did find was that it was much more human. The various hotels I had stayed in before, all with tremendous names, were very efficient; lifts shot you up to your aerial living-box with astonishing speed; letters and parcels were sent up at once; invisible chambermaids thoroughly cleaned and tidied and dusted; laundry came and went magically; every gadget known to the hotel-keeping profession was in full use; they were marvels of efficiency. But I cannot imagine anybody except Arnold Bennett enjoying a stay in them. They made you—or at least they certainly made me—quite miserable. They were no more human than a termitary, which indeed they resembled in both structure and atmosphere. For all I know, the Algonquin, which is by this time quite

old-fashioned as New York hotels go, may be considered by the hotel efficiency experts to be almost primitive, but I do know that it has warmth, kindness, humanity. If you happen to arrive when a dozen actresses are meeting in the lobby, all darting and screaming at each other, you may consider that it has rather too much warmth and humanity, but better too much than too little. Now and then in the Algonquin I felt I wanted to kill somebody. At the other hotels I have stayed in you never even saw anybody to want to kill them: you only wanted to kill yourself. The Algonquin is a favourite hotel for theatrical folk, and there are times there when you have had as much theatre as you can stand, but it has all the easy comradeship and kindness of the stage at its best, and its proprietor, Frank Case, is a real person, the friend of his guests, and not a robot in an office, and it is cosy and slightly absurd, and the food is very good. Turning in there, after Broadway, which represents everything I dislike in America, all lit up and ten times lifesize, it was like coming home.

With New York itself I think I came to rather better terms than I had ever done before. It was very pleasant sneaking away for an hour or so to look at the Frick collection of pictures, at the Cretan designs in the Metropolitan Museum, or at the sea-lions in Central Park. And there were plenty of friends, American and English, for lunch or dinner. We saw some plays too, but only one that really meant any-

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

thing, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, beautifully written and produced with a touch of genius. This was the American Theatre being truly and grandly creative, and it was worlds away from such hard, smart, cheap rubbish as *The Women* and some other successes of the time. *Our Town*, like nearly everything that is really good in American writing, had not come out of the life of New York or any other big city. It is the country and the small towns that produce the deeply creative writing, and the influence of the cities, especially New York, is curiously sterilising. I remember a long talk I had with Tom Wolfe at the Century Club on this very theme, and little did I realise then that I was looking at this young Titan for the last time on this earth. Wolfe himself had always seemed to me magnificently representative of the authentic American genius in writing. He was the vast, sprawling, undisciplined continent made literate. He was a giant out of the American soil. He had dozens of faults that any neat little whippersnapper of a novelist could correct, but, unlike all such, he had the creative fire, the teeming mind, the great heart. He could not bother inventing novels; there was not time, as we know now; so he laboured day and night, working the most fantastic hours, turning his own life, where he had been and what he had seen and whatever came into his head, into a colossal prose poem, huge chunks of which were torn off, shaped a little, and called novels. His whole mode of life was not



unlike that of some gigantic half-crazed pioneer. In complete solitude, he would write for hours and hours and hours on end, like a man tearing into a hill to find gold, and then he would come plunging out into the world, to talk and drink whole nights away, like a miner or cowboy hitting town. He was not a little book or two in front of his publishers, but millions of words in front of them. We thought this was because, being much larger than the common run of men, he had to do everything on a bigger scale. Now I think differently. I believe that he toiled so madly because he knew deep in his heart that he had much to say and only a little time to say it. He felt obscurely but deeply that his time and life with us were curving sharply back again into the shadows. If he was not aware, in some innermost recess, that his would be an early death, he is hard to explain, whereas if we grant him this knowledge we can understand everything. He will remain in my mind as a symbolic figure of the American character and genius: a young Titan out of the New World, with great bleeding hands, but with eyes like a child's, hewing and battering his way towards the summit of another Olympus.

*Time and the Conways* was still running in London and so another company had been recruited for the New York production. It was a good company, headed by Sybil Thorndyke and Jessica Tandy, and they had been carefully rehearsed in London before

setting sail. The result was that we had in New York as good a production as the one that had been so highly praised in London. If Jessica Tandy could not quite achieve the flashing bitterness of Jean Forbes Robertson in the Second Act, she made up for this by bringing to the Third Act an exquisite heart-breaking quality of her own. Indeed, I think the last few minutes of the play were more moving in the New York production than in the London one. They were to us, the people concerned in the production, but not to the audience. Yet Americans who had seen the play in London had been just as enthusiastic about it as our own playgoers. They had been equally enthusiastic about *Eden End*. What makes the difference, I believe now, is the background. The rhythm of life outside the playhouse must be taken into account. A wild comedy that may seem exhilarating in the harsh and fantastic atmosphere of New York, as for example *You Can't Take It With You*, may appear stupidly grotesque in the heavier air and slower tempo of London. On the other hand, plays such as *Eden End* and *Time and the Conways* that try to evoke a tender intimate atmosphere of family life, which London understands, can easily seem dull and anæmic to New York. This, and nothing else that I can imagine, explains why an apparently intelligent New York dramatic critic could say that I seemed to him, who liked my books, to underestimate the theatre because in his opinion I obviously wrote down to it, negli-

gently lowering my voice. Nothing could be further from the truth. (I can speak with confidence, for I am referring to my own attitude towards my work, not to its value.) As a novelist, working in a medium that has no special attraction, I have often been guilty of writing down, of an easy negligence, but in the drama, the form of writing I most enjoy, I am at once boldly experimental and extremely conscientious. And this is, I think, recognised by critics here in England. A play, however, suffers far more than a book does from this change of background, this difference in the rhythm of life. It was unfortunate too for us that only a few days before our play opened in New York, the very successful American comedy already mentioned, *You Can't Take It With You*, which had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize, had failed in London, following a rather contemptuous Press. This was not a very good moment to advertise the opening of a "London success." One could almost hear them saying "Oh yeah!"

American dramatists have described how bewildered and miserable they have been when their plays were being produced in London under conditions quite different from those in New York, for this is an anxious and nervous time for a writer even at the best, when you are at home and know all the tricks, and it can be horrible indeed when you are working in almost a strange world. I will confess that I found this Broadway experience very unpleasant.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I did not like the complicated and never very stable financial arrangements, especially after the straightforward working of my own little producing company at home. I love the drama, but I hate "show business," with its Monte Carlo atmosphere, its bargaining for "a piece of the show," its sly cheating almost for cheating's sake. The work of the Theatre is sufficiently difficult and exhausting without having to struggle with this shifting web of finance. Then again, the Theatre in New York, after long experience of bad managers, has so fortified itself with trade union rules and regulations that you can hardly move in it. Production is both absurdly cumbersome and expensive. The stage hands, paid seventy-five dollars a week for removing a chair or a cup-and-saucer, walked about the theatre as if they owned it. Lighting rehearsals went with irritating and very expensive slowness. The cost of moving scenery and properties was ridiculous. There was nothing wrong with these people as human beings, but the system seemed to put the emphasis on mutual mistrust and made co-operation difficult. This is all wrong. People who work in a theatre should be honestly treated and decently paid, but the drama is not an industry but a co-operative venture, a communal art, in which the trade union attitude of mind is quite out of place. Before a production is perfected, everybody in the theatre should be concentrating on getting it right and not thinking about time-sheets. (And it was at a first

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

night of mine in London, not in New York, that the stage carpenter called away the man on the curtain to discuss a time-sheet so that the man missed lowering the final curtain, and we were only saved from disaster by the electrician, who "blacked out" the stage.) Nobody should work in a theatre who does not want to be its loyal and enthusiastic servant. A theatre should not be treated as if it were a factory. If this means that the drama should be taken out of capitalist control, well and good; but what is intolerable is that the playhouse, with its hard and exacting work, should be the scene of the usual capital versus labour dog-fight. It creates the wrong atmosphere.

There is far more in a play's failure than loss of money or work or fame. Injured vanity does not explain all the dramatist's distress, which has in it dark elements of bewilderment and despair. Here is something that deeply moves you and those close to you, who have perhaps worked long and lovingly at it. Along comes another set of people, not members of some strange race but ordinary fellow creatures, and now they stare without comprehension or show signs of irritation or boredom, and afterwards ask you publicly what you think you are doing. It is easy enough to say that this or that could be improved, that tastes differ, that what looks good in one place may not look good in another, but the bewilderment and despair remain. You feel that you are working in one world while they have their existence in another.

Communication has broken down. Are you lost or are they? Or are we all lost? God knows we authors are almost urgent cases of injured vanity, but I am certain that in the depths of this bewilderment mixed with despair, which fortunately does not last long or does not seem to last long, although the psyche may carry its scars, we are far removed from vanity or all thought of our personal reputation. Moreover, with this play, the situation was complicated by the fact that I had introduced into it or based it upon a theory of Time that seemed to me, and to many other persons, as important as it was at first difficult to understand. That this theory should be hastily and contemptuously dismissed, by light-hearted newspapermen who had never given an hour's thought to the subject, seemed to me then, and seems to me still, unpardonable. With each of the Time plays, both in London and New York, many dramatic critics, with an air of vast intellectual superiority, produced observations that were childish. They had not even begun to grasp the ideas in the plays. I make no pretensions to be a very profound thinker, but compared with the average run of dramatic critics I do not rate badly, and if I have read nearly everything that has been written on a subject and have given that subject a great deal of thought, I cannot see why any man who spends most of his evenings looking at bad plays should think he is going to set me right in a hastily-written column. Surely, it would be more sensible, modest and useful

for the critic to say "These ideas seem quite fantastic to me and I do not pretend to understand them" and then go on to estimate the force and quality of the play itself? Instead of pretending to an encyclopædic knowledge he does not possess, the critic should tell his readers what kind of evening he had in the theatre. He might use a little space examining the play's technique. He might consider—and he rarely does—the art of the actor. But while complaining of the space they are given, many critics waste much of it because they will insist upon proving that they know more about everything than the dramatist does.

One good friend the play made in New York was Claude Bragdon, architect, stage designer, and author of many essays on higher space and kindred subjects. (He has since published a very good autobiography, *More Worlds Than One*.) Ideas keep men young. I was astonished to find that Bragdon, who had the look of a healthy man in his fifties, was actually in his seventies. He has had a very full life, of a kind unusual in America. One odd thing about him was that he struck me at once as looking curiously Oriental, like a calm wise Chinese, but I did not mention this until he had told me that he had a passion for Chinese art and that he had always felt, quite profoundly, that in a previous existence he had lived in ancient China. Deep feeling, he observed, is the test or, if you like, the clue; and I thought then, and think still, there is much wisdom in this belief. Whether we hold the

view that we are immortal beings who make frequent reappearances on this earth or go to the other extreme and believe we are bits of matter that think, the fact remains that sudden and mysterious depths of feeling are revealed to us—by a certain kind of country, some particular form of art, some period of history, or even by a type of face—and we cannot understand why we should be strangely and deeply moved, for there is nothing in our superficial history to account for it. You may not believe with Claude Bragdon that you have existed before and that here is a clue to the nature of that existence; I do not find in myself any haunting feeling that I have lived in some other age; but unless you follow the psychologists who tell us that the whole mysterious hinterland of our minds owes everything to a few experiences in childhood, you will have to confess that these profound emotions, which enrich our lives, are tests of and clues to our essential nature, to the innermost self. And certainly they do not belong to the small rational world, the little surface of life they map for us in the text-books. Nor do they merely colour the interior of people's lives. They can shape and change the whole outward mode of living. One young man walks into a museum gallery of Egyptian antiquities and afterwards arranges his whole existence so that he can meditate on ancient Egypt. A woman on a long journey comes to a desert and is so deeply stirred that ever afterwards her heart aches to return to it. A man will toil



day and night for years so that at last he can retire to a distant island that he knew for one morning. A girl will marry a man because he is the only one within reach who has a certain kind of speaking voice. This call to and response from the essential nature, the innermost self, we call romance, and it is as common as blackberries, and yet a mystery.

It was from Claude Bragdon, sitting in the smoke and chatter of the Algonquin after lunch, that I learned something about C. H. Hinton, whom he had known. Hinton was one of the earliest fourth dimension enthusiasts, and he was the most fanatical of them all. (He constructed a set of variously-coloured cubes and issued the most elaborate instructions for arranging them and then memorising these arrangements, all in order to obtain a definite mental picture of the tesseract, the four-dimensional solid. Enthusiasm can go no further than this.) He was really a higher space, not a Time, theorist, and much of what he wrote, mostly about forty years ago, has been enormously improved upon by Dunne, whose speculations are both bolder and greater in scope. But Hinton throws out all manner of exciting hints and guesses, especially in his *New Era of Thought* and his *Scientific Romances*, which are clumsily written, but are remarkable productions from a teacher of mathematics. He was obviously not only an original thinker of some power, but also a delightful odd fish, and for some time I had been wanting

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

to learn more about him. He had been dead for thirty years, and he seemed to have left few traces in London; though now I discovered from Blagdon that he had spent the latter part of his life in America. What would Hinton have thought if he could have wandered into the large studio of the N.B.C. in Radio City and heard me, as one of the performers in the Royal Gelatine Hour, discussing the fourth dimension, for an audience of millions and millions, with a singer and dance-band leader, Rudy Vallee? What would have astonished him—and indeed it ought to astonish us—is the mad mixture. On one side, the Royal Gelatine Hour, crooning, comic turns, advertisement. On the other, the splendour of Radio City itself, the magnificent sweep of the large studio (a great concert hall hundreds of feet above the ground), the magical network of radio communication, over which there goes, to all forty-eight states, a talk about his beloved fourth dimension. The difference between British broadcasting and American radio may be noticed here. The B.B.C. is so inelastic in its programmes and arranges them so far ahead that a restless fellow like myself cannot come to any terms with the organisation. No doubt, after a few months' notice and the exchange of many letters, it would be possible to give a ten-minutes talk at Broadcasting House on the fourth dimension and Time theories. But the B.B.C. would never dream of popping such a talk into the middle of one of their most successful

variety programmes. But that is what the Americans did—and very well it worked too. My own relations with the B.B.C. have always been very pleasant and friendly—and I particularly like the enthusiastic experimenting little group in the Television studios at Alexandra Palace—but I must admit that I have always found broadcasting an easier task in America, where I have sometimes given a talk at less than a day's notice. The American companies, the N.B.C. and Columbia, have gigantic networks and they must have complicated programme arrangements, but somehow with them, even if you are broadcasting for them from London itself, it all seems simpler and quicker and more free-and-easy. With the Americans you are not made to feel that just round the corner, in his orderly-room, is some tremendous ex-naval or military big-wig, who is bound to disapprove of all that is being said and done. The young men at Broadcasting House are both hardworking and intelligent, but you always feel that their movements are severely limited, that some unseen superior official has them at the end of a rope. This is all very well in government departments, which are chiefly concerned with creating a chain of responsibility, but it makes a very poor atmosphere for art and entertainment. We clowns like to feel easy.

We remained in New York until nearly the end of January, earning no money, for the play, though it had its own audience, was not doing good business

(very few plays were, that month); and spending far too much. The friend from England had been delayed, otherwise my wife, who hated the cold sleety days and was longing for the Arizona sun again, would have returned to the West. There were some compensations. We attended the premiere of Disney's *Snow White*, which began at about one in the morning, in one of the huge Broadway theatres, packed with all the hard-boiled representatives of the film trade; and it was curious to see this tough audience melting before the little coloured fairy-tale. We listened to and looked at the most expensive orchestra in the world, the orchestra that had been assembled at Radio City for a series of concerts on the air conducted by Toscanini. Outside our small circle of friends there, we were always meeting old acquaintances or making new ones. We discovered some good places to eat in: dining is a nightly adventure in New York. But at heart we were both tired and dispirited. Only a handful of people really cared about the beautiful performance of my play that the company was now giving. We had had enough of New York, as we realised when we returned to it after a delightful little stay in Old Greenwich, with its icy green inlets and chill sparkle, as guests of the Hendrik van Loons. My wife had not come to America for the cities, but for her beloved desert; and to try and paint a skyscraper or two, from our window in the Algonquin, was only a pitiful substitute for the rides and picnics with the

children and the happy sketches of the magenta hills. I had been left irritated by the silly criticism of my play, melancholy at the thought that this fine production, at which our company had worked so hard, meant so little, and saddened rather than angered by the attempt of some newspapermen, even now, to make damaging copy out of misreports of my opinions that were years old and ought to have been buried long ago. The elaborate negotiations to continue the run of the play, with suggested changes in the financial arrangements arriving at all hours of day and night, were wearisome and even to refer to them soon began to leave a stale taste in the mouth. I would have shrugged my shoulders and cleared out if I had not felt that I had to look after my players, mostly young people who had never been to America before and were bewildered and anxious. And then, probably because I was tired, I was suffering from indecision about my work.

I could not decide what I ought to do next, and of all moods, as any writer will testify, this is perhaps the most miserable. I had a notebook that offered sufficient ideas for ten years' work, but not one of them clamoured to be attended to at once. I do not know how other people work, for oddly enough I do not remember ever discussing the subject with a fellow author, but my habit is to put down the ideas as they arrive in a little black notebook that goes everywhere with me, just an entry of a line or two for each pos-

sible play or novel; and then, unless the idea insists upon being worked on at once, as *Time and the Conways* did, I wait until I find myself thinking more and more about one particular idea, hear it knocking more and more urgently, before deciding to set to work on it. Much of this winnowing and choosing is of course an unconscious activity. Down there in the jungle the ideas struggle for precedence. The method is based on the assumption that there is a survival of the fittest. On the whole it works well. But now it was not working at all; half a dozen different ideas merely made more or less equal and half-hearted attempts to gain my attention; and yet I wanted to be at work again, once I returned to the quiet of my shack. So there I was, badgered and weary, spending without earning, not having much fun, and not knowing what to do next. And as I am going<sup>d</sup> back now over what I did and where I went during these two years and more, I am leaving out any reference to the state of the world, but you may be sure that in the month of January, 1938, even though the landslide had hardly begun, there was many a rumble, many a crack, and nothing I heard or read made for consolation. The time was out of joint.

## X

ALL THE WAY BACK ACROSS THE AMERICAN CONTINENT, after the sleet and noise and fuss, I had seen shining before me the sunlit quiet and calm of Arizona. But there was not much sunlight for several weeks, and little undisturbed quiet. It was a period of irritating cables and telegrams. We had to decide when *I Have Been Here Before* should be done in New York, and this, with some minor problems, produced an extravagant bombardment of cables, sometimes two or three in a day. Then there were telegrams from New York about *Time and the Conways*, which was still lingering on there, and various offers from Hollywood, all of which I refused. I did not feel interested in films just then, and for the first time during a stay in America I never even visited Hollywood that winter. All this was unsettling; and then the news from Europe was beginning to look very sinister. We had some spells of rain, which is all wrong on the Arizona desert, clean out of key. I re-wrote parts of *Johnson Over Jordan*, and then began a play I had had in mind for some time, a play about a family called Linden. It was to be called, rather prettily, *The Linden Tree*. There was old Linden, an engineer with a touch of genius, who had

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

built up a great firm of motor engineers. In the middle of the first act, which showed a directors' meeting, he returned unexpectedly from a long visit to the East, bringing with him a fantastic Oriental philosopher and a mysterious girl. The old man, who was now more interested in wisdom than in motor engines, threw several bombshells of remarks into the directors' meeting, and really set the play going. Then there were his two sons and their wives, well-to-do middle-aged people of a conventional type, or rather of several conventional types. And then there were the young people, the third generation of Lindens, the bewildered or rebellious children of this age. I wrote a good long first act, beginning artfully with this meeting of the board and then bringing in the old man, who was a good ripe character, and his little entourage, and everything went merrily, with nothing wrong anywhere. I waded into the second act, did a very effective little scene between the old man and his elderly chief foreman, a Labour man of the old-fashioned type; discovered one of the middle-aged male characters coming to life admirably; dashed in a scene between the two middle-aged women, mother and aunt, and the girl; and was working with quite remarkable ease, vigour and mastery when, right in the middle of this fine second act, I had to break off. Then it occurred to me to show what I had done to my wife, to whom I never take bits of work but only fair-sized slabs of it, two or three chapters of



a book and at least a whole act of a play. She read this act and a half, which I had turned over to her calmly and confidently, and declared without any hesitation that it was not like me at all and might have been a play written by somebody else. I came out of my dream, and now took a good look at it myself. There was nothing really wrong with it; a sensible and fairly solid play was in the making there; but she was quite right, it belonged to some other man. I do not know what man; there was no suggestion of anybody's influence; but it was not really mine. So I put the manuscript on one side; and though I know it came home with me, now I do not know where it is and do not care. Perhaps one day I shall go to a theatre and discover that it is being played: *The Linden Tree*—with old Linden marching in to the directors' meeting, middle-aged sporting Linden running off with the mysterious girl with whom young Linden thought he was in love; the Linden girl making her appeal to her cousin, this same young Linden; and that fine quiet scene at the very end, when the wise old Linden talks to his grandchildren; and everybody will applaud this sound solid comedy of character and ideas, which will be praised by our senior critics because it will be written in an early Granville-Barker manner, a technique they can now understand, and nobody will applaud more enthusiastically than the man who once typed some of it in his Arizona shack. But who will the real author be?

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

So that was that, and no idea came urgently knocking. But our friend Dorothy Brooke had now arrived, and we wrote to Fig Newton, who had gone wandering with us before, and when he came over from San Diego, we packed the pair of them, and *Pont* (who had been doing his *British Character* drawings for *Punch* at this ranch for the last two or three months), and ourselves and some duffle-bags into our station wagon, and set out to show Dorothy and *Pont* the blazing miracle of the American South-West. We showed them Death Valley and Boulder Dam and the Grand Canyon. We slept in auto-camps and ate out of tins at the wayside. Sometimes the car was unpleasantly hot and dusty and at other times it was skidding on snow. We ranged from two hundred feet below sea-level to seven thousand feet above it. We enjoyed everything, deserts and mountains and miraculous blue air; solemnly and happily absorbed it all, refreshing and rejoicing the spirit; and because we were happy and all friends and footloose we made thousands of schoolboy jokes and giggled. If I could remember any of the jokes, I would not repeat them; but all that I can remember is that we giggled. Sometimes it was worse than that. When the mechanical organ in Death Valley Scotty's Castle, that fabulous remote stronghold, suddenly assaulted us with a Liszt Hungarian rhapsody, we went into corners and exploded. In the restaurant at Las Vegas, where we had buffalo steak for dinner, the idiocy rose to such a

pitch that *Pont* finally put his head down on the table and cried with laughter. But while I was being bounced about among the duffle-bags at the back of the station wagon, I was working out the chapters of a story, based on an idea I had had for years. It seemed to me that the preposterous action could be set in this astonishing part of the world. I would use the five of us, with some necessary disguises, as the chief characters. I made a few notes as we went along, and then on our return to the ranch I set to work and within nineteen days had written the tale. I called it *The Doomsday Men*, for it described how three crazy brothers (who are not unlike certain famous personages) tried to destroy the world. I enjoyed writing it, even at that wearing pace, and though it made no pretensions to be more than a faintly symbolic thriller, it moved at a good pace, sketched in some amusing backgrounds and minor characters, and actually had one or two pretty little bits of writing in it (try Chapter Eight), and so I hoped that other people would enjoy reading it. But I have a feeling that somehow they didn't. (Everybody said it would make a wonderful film—except the film people.) Perhaps the times are now too stern for this sort of Stevensonian lark. Or again, which is more likely, perhaps it just was not good enough. My own quite genuine zest in the story, which was not attempted simply to boil the pot, may not have come through the writing to heighten the reader's temperature.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Moreover, any plot involving the destruction of the whole world must end in an anti-climax, for clearly you cannot destroy the world and still tell the tale, and yet if you do not destroy it people feel disappointed. In short, I suppose *The Doomsday Men* was a mistake; yet I cannot see that it did anybody but myself any harm, and I cannot see that it did me any harm, for at a time when I felt restless and dissatisfied, not fit for anything more important, and when the sun had gone in and the rain and floods came, and in my shack I could now hear the Hassayampa roaring by, a torrent several hundred feet wide, I sat cosily for nearly three weeks and, in a happy if brittle dream, spun my yarn.

Our time at the ranch was now at an end, but we lingered on because we were waiting to learn that the trail to Rainbow Bridge was free of snow. Two years before, when I had been working in Santa Barbara, my wife and the older children had made this trip to Rainbow Bridge and they wanted to go again and take me with them. I had agreed and had actually arranged that I should write a long article about the trip for the *Saturday Evening Post*. But the Bridge was in high country, several hundred miles north of us, and it was impossible to go up there until the snow had gone. The Wilsons, with whom you stay up at Rainbow Lodge if you want to make the trip, had called at the ranch to discuss our visit, on their way back from the coast, and we had agreed to wait until word

came from them that the trails were open again. It was really much too early to be visiting that part of the world, which is summer country, but it was now early spring, our passages to England were booked, and within two or three weeks we would have to be sailing home. The word came: the trails were open, just open, barely open, but open. Once more we loaded the station wagon with duffle-bags: my wife and I; the three older children, who wept to say good-bye to the ranch; and a young handyman we had borrowed from the ranch, who knew more about the inside of a station wagon than we did. Before my schoolgirls had quite finished dabbling furtively at their eyes, we were climbing the mad corkscrew road to Prescott, heading north. Here a little geography might help. Rainbow Bridge, actually in Utah, is in the extreme north of the Indian Reservation, and most of the Indian Reservation is in northern Arizona and it is about as big as England. I had not been into the Reservation before and had only caught a tantalising glimpse of that part of it known as the Painted Desert. Both at Williams and Flagstaff we stopped to buy stuff for picnic lunches or emergencies, and made a jolly family job of it. I have an affection for those grocery stores on the edge of wild country; they have the look of trading posts or army railhead stores. "Get it here," they seem to announce, "or do without." So you wander about, examining the packed shelves, and order like a dashing explorer. It is family shopping

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

turned into an adventure. To buy a leather jerkin because on Navaho Mountain, where the Navaho war-god lives, there are icy winds! To take lollipops across the Painted Desert to the children of a strange dark race, probably descendants of the followers of Kublai Khan! We were spending a few dollars on pure romance.

It is only fifty miles from Flagstaff to Cameron (which sounds like a town, but is actually only a trading post and hotel camp at the entrance to the Reservation), and an easy straight road, but that road offers you one of the most dramatic quick changes of scenery and climate I have ever known. For the first part of it you go rolling through typical cool highlands of pine and fir and coarse grass, and there is nothing else to be seen. Then suddenly you drop into another world, and you are staring at the great glimmering expanse of the Painted Desert, bounded by unbelievable pink mesas. It is just as if you went in an instant from Scotland to a more highly coloured Sudan. Cameron, a tiny huddle of roofs against the vast desert, looks like the very end of the known world. The bridge just beyond it crosses the canyon of the Little Colorado, a small brother of the Grand Canyon, not so beautiful but equally strange and even more terrifying, for this Little Colorado Canyon is abrupt, sheer, black-shadowed, very menacing. It is not a canyon for which you would ever come to feel any affection, only respect. Soon you are glad to take

your eyes away from its chill black depths and to look again at the upper world. You look across the bridge. It appears to lead to a golden-pinkish nowhere. So far as the other side is anything at all, apart from this golden-pinkish glow, it is simply not true. There are dinosaur tracks, large three-toed imprints, millions and millions of years old, in this region, not far from Cameron, and I saw some of them. But I doubt if I would have been much surprised to have seen a few of the monsters themselves still flopping about. The place was queer enough. We set out for a walk, but soon gave it up. I think the silence was too profound. You could not talk against it. There was something intimidating about its very completeness. Many of the Indians have the same quality, as I noticed afterwards. These Indians would emerge from nowhere, come up quietly, then stare and stare without making a sound. It is disconcerting. And this is what the Painted Desert did to us: it just stared and stared in complete silence, until, feeling like clattering loose-tongued midgets, we had to turn back and pretend it was not there. The trading post looked like a little box somebody had dropped on a wide sandy shore. As we sauntered back to it, there was a sunset. The western sky suddenly set itself on fire. It burned so fiercely that you felt that next morning you would see a great jagged black hole in the blue. After supper I smoked under the stars with a man from Boston and talked politics, until I was dragged into a bridge game in-

doors. Our opponents were a woman who was traveling from Los Angeles to Wisconsin and an old Indian trader, that is, a white trader to the Indians, who slapped down each card as if the trick might be taken by sheer force, and kept crying "Doggone it, I'm playing like a washerwoman!" Another trader's wife, a lively middle-aged woman from a distant canyon, which sounded about as remote as the moon, banged out old vaudeville songs on the piano. This may not be your idea of a cultured social evening, but it was good enough for us.

Next day we went through Tuba City, which has about as much right to call itself a city as I have to call myself the Incorporated Society of Authors. There are about four buildings in Tuba City, but after crossing the desert to get to it you feel that it is a city or near enough. From there we moved in a growing cloud of dust to Red Lake, which really is red. Indeed, the whole landscape is red, like a bit of Mars. A high wind was blowing, as it usually is there, and all you saw was whirling pink sand. I should hate to live at the trading post at Red Lake, for you must weary of that wind and sand. It took us some time, once past Red Lake, to find a place to eat in, but at last we came to some warm red rocks that gave us some shelter from the unpleasant wind. No sooner had we opened a can or two than a Navaho magically appeared out of the empty landscape, to stare at us and then giggle quietly. These Navahos, with their



round clay-covered hogans, have a trick of melting into the landscape. Soon we found there were two or three families near, with some enthusiastic lollipop-consumers amongst them. The children discovered one lad who could speak a little English, and this small, muffled-up, Oriental-looking figure solemnly informed us that his name was Adrian Whitehead. Just as if, instead of being a young Navaho, he had been the hero of a novel of the Nineties, a strong problem novel on religious doubt. There he was, in the middle of this windy desert, creeping out every morning with his sheep—Adrian Whitehead.

We had now to take the long trail up to Rainbow Lodge, where Bill and Katherine Wilson were expecting us. The Lodge is high on the side of the blue, sullen-looking Navaho Mountain. Once this trail had climbed above the whirling sand, it had all the appearance to me of a very desperate enterprise. Precariously we crossed enormous slabs of maroon and rust-coloured rock, over the edge of which there were tremendous and terrifying glimpses of a deep canyon, of rosy cliffs and immense blue shadows. It was all very impressive and very beautiful, but I would have enjoyed it more if I had been walking and not sometimes bounding and sometimes sliding past it in a heavily loaded station wagon. For there were six of us, our duffle-bags, and boxes of provisions and the mail that we had picked up at Cameron for the Lodge; and as we climbed higher and wound narrowly

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

up through a wilderness of boulders and grey sage and twisted junipers, the wagon often boiled, so that we had to stop at streams and fill the radiator again. The cold blue summit of Navaho Mountain would appear and then vanish again as we went slowly bumping and boiling along, and there was nothing to tell us what progress we were making. Now and then we got out to let our driver negotiate a dubious sticky patch with a lighter load. Nevertheless, there was still a glimmer of daylight left when at last we saw the tiny cabins of Rainbow Lodge high on the mountain-side. We put our names into what must be one of the remotest guest-books in the United States.

I suppose all the mountains and mesas you see from your cabin door up there, six thousand and four hundred feet high, have names and might be found on a map. But what you appear to see, in that stupendous look-out, is a vast ruined world, as if you were on Ararat in the Ark and the waters of the Flood had just subsided. The giant mesas, with their sculptured cliffs of red sandstone, look like the distant ruins of Babylon and Nineveh and Solomon's Jerusalem. The very romantic painters of a hundred years ago, devotees of the Sublime, were fond of covering enormous canvases with imaginary Biblical landscapes, where behind the figures of a prophet and a distressed female or two there arose mad wildernesses and mountain peaks of an astonishing improbability. What you see from Rainbow Lodge is like those old

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

landscapes, only it is much bigger, more boldly coloured, and quite real. Beyond the red ruins of all the antique capitals, into the blue rises line after line of mountain rock. You could drop an English county or two into the space of this view. Yet there is nowhere in it a single plume of smoke; no sign of human life; no sound except the huge sighing of the wind. You might be staring out at the fourth day of Creation. The air is clear and sweet, and fragrant with cedar and pine. There was one night when I saw more stars than I have ever seen before. The familiar large stars burned like blue lamps, but around them the whole sky was powdered with radiant dust, layer beyond layer of it faintly twinkling; so that we seemed to live in a crowded universe. What are we doing in it? Rainbow Lodge is the place in which to ask yourself those old questions. There were no daily papers up there, but sometimes we caught fragments of the news on the radio, and it crackled and croaked to us tidings of incredible folly and mounting madness, until there appeared a kind of irony in the deep silence of the spaces all round us. They had seen the giant reptiles come and go, had watched the prehistoric basket-makers and cliff dwellers and innumerable tribes of Indians and their war gods arrive and vanish, and now it was our turn. "At it again, eh?" the wind cried to the mountain.

As the weather was still unsettled, we had to wait several days before taking the pack trip down to Rain-

bow Bridge itself. On one of these days some of us went round the side of the mountain to Dunn's trading post, which must be one of the remotest on the Reservation. While we were in the store, looking at the silver bracelets that were left in pawn, a Navaho woman arrived with her herd of sheep and brought in a small sack of wool. The Navahos are a pastoral folk, but their shepherding is done by the children and the women, who actually own the herds. The men build the hogans, do any hunting and fighting that may be necessary, and fashion the extraordinary "sand paintings" and ceremonial songs that are part of all important occasions in the life of the tribe. The men reserve to themselves the high philosophical arts, and leave to the women the handicrafts, such as weaving, and all the practical affairs of their common life. This seems to be very sensible and to be based on a good rough-and-ready knowledge of the psychology of the sexes, and if there has to be such a division between men and women, this one is much wiser than the common American division, which hands all cultural matters over to women and assumes that the male is the practical sex. The Navahos may be ignorant of many things, but at least they know better than that. So here was this Navaho woman, in charge of the family business, bringing her little sack of wool to the store. And it was queer to see how the trader, a pleasant young man with rimless spectacles, who looked as if he would be at home behind the prescrip-

tion counter of a drug-store, suddenly changed his easy, hearty style to suit the slow, mysterious manner of the Indian woman. He and the visiting squaw now appeared to be taking part in a solemn mystery. He weighed her wool under her dark unwinking stare, and then allowed her the necessary credit so that now she could buy whatever she wanted. There was no sign from her that she had probably been looking forward most eagerly to this shopping expedition for days, though we were told afterwards that she had. With an air of slow strange secrecy, pointing and murmuring a word or two, she acquired a reel of cotton and some flour and onions, as if by some magical process. When we had seen her go, we visited the tiny school, where the Indian children looked like small Chinese. Their drawings were excellent, yet strangely different, in their bold primitive colouring, from our own children's efforts. A different racial history comes out even in the childish handling of crayons and chalks. We are all wonderful creatures.

I remember that in order to give an account of one of these days at Rainbow Lodge from a different angle, I stole, not borrowed but flatly stole, an extract from a diary kept by one of my daughters, aged thirteen, and here it is, with not one word altered:

Mummy and Mr. Wilson and me went to the hogan of Red Shirt and family. When we got there there was a sweet little black and white puppy out-

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

side. Inside was Red Shirt's mother-in-law, one of the 3 squaws of the chief, at least they didn't have a chief but he was an adviser. She wore a green-grey faded velvet shirt and an old tattered dirty red skirt, very torn, with a green stripe at the bottom. She had lovely mocassins, and a beautiful bracelet. The hogan was filled with about 20 dirty sheepskins they slept on, a fire that smoked because of the wind. There were broken saucepans, bowls of dirty water, a beautiful bow with arrows, a saddle, blanket and bridle, etc. Mummy gave her some lollipops and she thanked us and giggled like a little girl.

She told us with signs and Navaho language her eyes hurt her because of the wind and she was cold and showed her ragged skirt. We got the mutton we came after, beside it were two hunks of salt lick. Her husband and son-in-law, etc., were away in the hills and her daughter was herding sheep. . . . In the morning we made our beds then there was a lot of talk and we decided to see the cliff dwellings on Navaho Mountain. We all went down to the corral and watched them saddle up. There were 7 colours of corn—blue, pale blue, black, white, purple, red and pink. We went quite a long way to an old fort, stiff with pottery, then further up several other ruins all covered with chips of pottery. It was bitterly cold, there were only a few clouds but in the wind it was biting. Mummy and Mr. Wilson

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

stayed down and built a fire and all us went up.

We went up quite a long way and found just one or two quite nice ruins on a ledge where (as it was such a high altitude) we all stretched out and panted like dogs. A. and S. and I went up a little way and found a steep rock where a piece of wood (quite wobbly) was stood. We all climbed up to the top and there were about 6 well preserved houses and some walls. We found caves with fires in and old corn cobs and I found wads of pottery pieces. When we went home all my pockets rattled and I had to hold them. . . .

On which account of the matter I, who was one of the party that went up quite a long way and stretched out and panted like dogs, do not think I can improve. There is some masterly observation in that passage. And I like the faint contempt surrounding the terse phrase "there was a lot of talk". Why sit about and jabber in wonderland?

It was that night, after we had explored the ruins up the cliffs, that we were joined at the Lodge by a very tall, thin, elderly man whom I will call the Wanderer. My womenfolk did not take to him, partly because neither his looks nor his incessant talk pleased them, and also because he had intruded, though innocently enough, into our happy little family party with the Wilsons. But he interested me because he was a figure from a new American world, dating from

the great slump, a world that has not had the attention from American writers that it deserves. It marks, too, a very significant change of attitude and values. It is a world of wanderers, sometimes solitary like this man, sometimes travelling in the domesticity of trailers, sometimes moving slowly but uproariously with whole families crammed into old cars, hung about with bedding and frying-pans, and usually carrying an Oklahoma licence plate. A new world of the endless road and its fantastic figures, for ever moving on, watching through the windshield the orange groves of the South turn into the apple orchards of the North, crossing deserts and mountains, now halting by the giant cacti of Arizona, now camping under the snowy pines of Oregon. The old world of the road and its travellers produced *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Tom Jones* and *Pickwick Papers*, but where are the sagas and comic epics of this new world? All the material is there. Characters as odd, adventures as strange, as any that Cervantes and Fielding and Dickens described are here, waiting for their chronicler. The appetite for such huge, crowded, wandering tales is probably as great as ever it was. No English author could adequately present this American scene—alas, alas!—and so I hand over this goldmine to some American colleague. Why doesn't Sinclair Lewis spend six months roaming the roads of the West, and then lock himself in for the next six months and produce a *picaresque* masterpiece?



## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

Our Wanderer would make a character in it. He came in a rather battered truck, which served him as a caravan. For the last ten years, he told us, he had quit regular business, and now spent most of his time roaming round these states, especially the Western ones, in this truck. His chief item of expense was gasoline. For the rest, he lived the life of a lord of travel on next to nothing. During his wanderings he had acquired an astonishing amount of information, mostly quite useless. He knew what towns were coming on and what towns were going off; where there was good trade and where there was bad; the volume of business that remote canning factories were achieving; in what regions cattle were fattening well; how fruit was paying in Oregon or oil in Texas; in short, he was a voluble commercial directory and guide-book. You could have concocted another New Deal out of an evening of his talk. In his mind was a gigantic road map of all these Western states that he could unroll at will. Sucking at an empty pipe and in a strangely melancholy tone, as if he were haunting us on behalf of the Department of the Interior, he would reel off statistics that were as useless to him as they were to us. Wherever there was any kind of track, from Houston to San Diego, from Tucson clean up to Puget Sound, he had taken himself and his truck and bed and wash-bowl and pipe, acquiring and imparting a multitude of facts that nobody wanted. Yet who are we to say that nobody wanted his facts?

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The wind bloweth where it listeth, but it bears with it the flying seeds. The Wanderer may have been designed and set going for some such purpose, to drop a fertilising hint about salmon canning in Seattle to some wondering lad in Texas, to whisper here and there in Minnesota that the grape-fruit were now ripening in Maricopa County, Arizona.

The very first thing I saw next morning was the tall, lean, rather melancholy figure of the Wanderer, mounted on a mule and looking not unlike Don Quixote, moving past my cabin. He was the advance-guard of our pack train to Rainbow Bridge. The main body left an hour or two later, and consisted of three Priestley daughters and their parents, Bill Wilson and his cowboy hand, Chance, and our handyman, Dallas. There were also three pack-mules. It was quite an impressive cavalcade when it left the Lodge, but very soon lost its impressiveness when it began crawling round the canyons. Bill Wilson, who looks after this trail, more or less re-discovering it every spring, says that it is fourteen miles from the Lodge to Rainbow Bridge; and as I have an affection for Bill, with whom I used to have long and involved arguments about the American Civil War, I am not going to say that it is not fourteen miles. But I have a suspicion that a few miles have been overlooked somewhere. It would be very easy to do that on this trail, which begins by wandering in and out of a few small canyons (any one of these gorges would be a show-place in the Eastern

states or in England), and then suddenly launches you and your mule into the stupendous Cliff Canyon, looking down a clear two thousand feet. Then you squeeze through Red Bud Pass, which had to be blasted out, and could do with plenty more blasting, and had some from me. You are now in Bridge Canyon. This says nothing, but the trouble is that what you see on this trail cannot be adequately photographed, drawn, painted or described. It is as if the mile-high walls of the Grand Canyon had been cut up and then thrown about the landscape. If that does not convey very much, then imagine yourself travelling at all angles between colossal sandstone cliffs—golden, orange, rust-brown, vermilion, magenta—sometimes smoothly sliced off for five hundred feet or so, sometimes like thousand-foot bastions of burnished copper, sometimes tortured into weird high pinnacles. You travel nearly all day, and every few minutes the whole thing looks different, with the sunlight working miracles at every turn. It is the landscape of some mad Arabian Nights story. Sindbad the Sailor must have known something like it, and as the years went on he must have felt that the others were right and that he was a liar. It is not simply the stupendous size of everything, making you feel like a fly that has wandered into a normal-sized gorge or glen. It is not even the fantastic towering shapes of rock, though they are impressive enough, that do the trick. You have to add to these the colour, the wild riot of colours, making

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

every other kind of mountain scenery you have known seem by comparison a dingy affair of greys and blacks. A sun glaring out of a turquoise sky on to enormous faces of sandstone rock at every possible angle produces a wealth of warm colouring, from palest gold to deepest crimson, that is past believing. You go for seven hours through a paint-box half a mile thick. If an artist like Turner had seen this landscape, he would have gone raving mad. Unless, of course, unknown to us all, Turner has been employed for the last eighty years, by a heavenly W.P.A. scheme, to enlarge and fantasticate the rocks and splash on more colour. Anything might happen in a world that offers you such a trail.

It ended in a place that looked the perfect setting for Wagner's *Siegfried*. If Hitler ever sees it, he will claim it at once for the Reich. Salmon-pink and cinnamon-coloured cliffs at least five hundred feet high were folded over to make a gigantic shallow cave. The canyon itself turned sharply to the left, and as we looked down that way we caught our first glimpse of Rainbow Bridge. It looked disappointing, and for two good reasons: it was still about a mile away; and at that distance it was dwarfed by the giant bastions of rock on each side of it. So we pretended we had not seen it, and kept straight on to camp, which was in the shadow of the pink-and-cinnamon cave. Bill and Chance soon had a big fire going, and it was strange, then and for the next few hours, to hear the crackling

of the burning sticks immensely amplified by the great overhanging walls into sounds sharper than pistol-shots. By the time the cowboy biscuits and the meat and fried potatoes and coffee were ready, daylight had gone, and as the vast curving walls, streaked with black, reflected the firelight, we seemed to be surrounded by giant specimens of primitive pottery. Afterwards, round the camp-fire, the children helped to ruin their eyesight by entering up their diaries, while the rest of us smoked and talked. Bill and Chance agreed that there were as many cowboys now as there had ever been, only now you hear little or nothing about them. The Wanderer, still sucking at his empty pipe, kept us informed as to the state of trade in East Texas, the mining activities in Southern Arizona, the canning plant in Phoenix, the condition of cattle between Kingman and Las Vegas, the fishing in the High Sierras, the winter feed in Idaho and Montana, the progress of the new dam on the Columbia River, with passing references to roads, bridges, trucks, snow-shoes, railroads, auto camps, and the history of the American Theatre between 1900 and 1927. When the children had finished with their diaries, they played noughts and crosses in the sand. The smoke went up to the firelit cliffs and then vanished into the indigo night.

Early morning was a miracle. Some of the cliffs were deep black and others were pale gold. The world, it seemed, had just been newly created for us. This

was the blue air of Eden. We made our way after breakfast to the Bridge. The others were going farther along to the Colorado River, several miles away, but I was stiff and wanted an easy day. Moreover, I preferred to make the Bridge itself my farthest point of travel, the supreme goal, and I looked forward to having a few hours alone with it. So I remained in the silent blazing canyon, to smoke and dream in the shadow of the great arch. There was no disappointment now. This Rainbow Bridge is indeed one of the wonders of the world, and perhaps the last of them, for until 1909 no white man had ever set eyes on it, and even now only a comparative few have seen it. It is not really a bridge—if it were, it would be merely one of many—but a true arch, almost symmetrical, and though several hundred feet high, large enough to span most great public buildings, it has a noble grace and delicacy. The day was perfect. The sky, seen through the vast arch, was an indescribably brilliant turquoise, several shades darker than the shining stone of the Bridge itself. The view through the arch, with a patch of bright green vegetation below, brilliant sky above, and between them the burnished coppery cliffs and bastions of the canyon sharply framed, was an enchantment. You felt you had only to walk through that noble arch to find yourself in another and better world. Everything through there, beyond that magical frame, would be different. There, it seemed, as the Navahos cry at the end of their song prayers, “All is

peace, all is peace." The Indians, who perhaps show a truer perception in these matters than we do, regarded this great rainbow of stone as a sacred thing, a sign set there by the gods. Their prayer to it, quoted by Mrs. John Wetherill in her book on the Navahos, seems to me both appropriate and beautiful, with its invocation to the four winds—the Black Wind, the Blue Wind, the Yellow Wind, and the Iridescent Wind—with its repeated cry, which should find a terrible echo in our hearts: "That it may be peaceful before me, that it may be peaceful behind me. All is peace, all is peace."

As I loitered in that remote magical place, half-drowned in its sunlight and enchantment, I wondered how much wiser we are than those primitive singers. We have no prayer or song for the Bridge, but our geologists have worked out an explanation of how it came into existence. This gives us a temporary comfortable feeling of knowing the answer. Here's a neat trick in stone, we say, the handiwork of erosion. The fact that we can say that confirms our smiling superiority. Great scientists, from Newton to Einstein, do not talk and feel in this fashion, because in their powerful minds are the necessary elements of wonder and awe. But this is how knowing little minds behave, and we have millions of them. If they could see this noble rock, they would ask for and receive a geological explanation of its presence there, then go away and settle down to a hand at cards. There is

nothing wrong with the geological explanation as far as it goes, but how far does it go? We are too apt to think that because we can understand how a thing came to be shaped, we know all about it. But an acoustic study of the workings of string, reed and brass instruments does not explain the magic of a Beethoven symphony; it only explains the machinery of communication between Beethoven's rich passionate mind and ours. This will be admitted. But does erosion really account for the Bridge any more than acoustics explain Beethoven? How do we know that Rainbow Bridge, like the majestic, solemn Grand Canyon, is not itself a kind of symphony? I felt what the Indians felt, and a song to the gods would have expressed my feelings better than a short geological treatise. And it is good for a man to open his mind to deep wonder and awe. It is just as good for him to do that as it is for him to sharpen his intellect on the problems of science. In this matter we might learn a little from the Indians without forfeiting a jot of our science. For are we not living too exclusively in a narrow world of how-the-trick-is-done, with too much How and not enough Why? And may not this be at the root of our profound contemporary dissatisfaction? The Indians who sang and prayed here under this arch lived in a magical world, with the result that though they had emotional satisfaction denied to us, their way of life remained unchanged, at the mercy of wind and weather, and they were the fearful



## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

servants and not the masters of their natural environment. We who write geological treatises on the Bridge are compelled, because our science demands it, to live in a mechanistic world, and though this has given us enormous power over our environment, so that outwardly we are conquerors, it has dried up the springs and wells of deep emotion within, so that we live inside ourselves as in a desert. What we must do now, I thought as I stared at the great arch, is to live both as geologists and as Indian poets, not throwing away our science and the mechanistic view of things it necessitates, but retaining them as an instrument of power, a tool against the stubborn earth, while at the same time we live at heart like poets and priests, aware that this is still a magical world, moving with wonder and awe through a mystery. Without science, we are helpless children. Without poetry and deep natural piety, we are blundering fools, reeling in our new and terrible cocksureness into one disaster after another. That is what I learned beneath Rainbow Bridge, and though now, on a rainy morning in the Isle of Wight, I can hardly believe that I saw so great a shining arch of stone, I have not forgotten.

Next day we took the trail back to the Lodge. The weather, which had been so kind to us at the Bridge, now decided to behave badly and be quite exceptional. The sun disappeared. Clouds clung to the mountain and boiled up round the high mesas. All far distances vanished. The Lodge was suspended mys-

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

teriously between an unseen earth and an invisible sky. Sometimes we were lashed with hail. This lasted for three days, making it impossible for us to leave, and it says much for the friendliness of Bill and Katherine Wilson that during this difficult little period, when we were eating them out of all their fresh provisions, we all became better friends than ever. The fourth morning was not much better, but we felt we must move on, so Bill accompanied our station wagon in his own car, to make sure we did not miss the return trail or stick anywhere. Now and then we wobbled and slithered, but only once had we to get out and push. But I was very glad when we had passed the last of those slabs of rock that overlooked the precipice. From Inscription House to Tonalea we zigzagged down what was left of a road of wet red clay, and learned at the trading post that the roads towards Monument Valley, in the North-East of the Reservation, where we had intended to go, were now impassable. We had no alternative but to return to Cameron, on the only road left. It was outside this trading post at Tonalea that we came across a cowboy who was making his way from Montana to Southern Arizona. He was riding one sorry horse, and leading another even worse, which was carrying his pack. He had a week's beard on him, was wet and cold, and did not know where the next bit of feed for his animals would come from; and he had come like this all the way from Montana, crossing the roughest

country on this continent, not for a definite job but merely following the rumour of a job. Even so, he was not worrying. He looked less anxious than ninety-nine persons out of every hundred you see in any big city. I had noticed this absence of anxiety before among these Western folk. The fact is that the West is too big to worry in. Fellows in New York and Hollywood may make wise-cracks about the "big open spaces," but the people who live in those spaces, I fancy, have the last laugh. While the clever fellows in the cities are worrying their lives away, the people who see fifty miles of open country every morning take it easy, digest the food they eat, and never miss an hour's sleep. Their open spaces do not shrink as the Wall Street figures are always doing. No chairman of the board can issue an order for the mountains to be folded up and the sun taken out of the sky.

As we made our way back to Cameron there was a little sandstorm on the Painted Desert. It seemed as if the whole earth was in uneasy movement. The road would waver and vanish. The surrounding desert would disappear, as if in smoke, then suddenly reappear in great golden levels. Ten days before, Cameron had looked like the end of the earth. Now, after the remote wildernesses we had just seen, it seemed like the beginning of the known world. There is a fine constant coming and going at Cameron, and a writer looking for rich material might do worse than to stay there. Anybody from a Navaho elder to

a film producer may turn up at those cross-roads. During an evening when I was talking to an American cavalry officer and to the promoter of an immense harbour project up in Oregon, my daughters were happily engaged in the back room of the store, teaching truck-drivers and Indians to play ping-pong. Hubert Richardson, the proprietor there, has been thirty years on the Reservation and knows everybody. He told me how once he had taken two visitors on a long trip through the Reservation and to the north of it, and how amazed they were because he knew people hundreds of miles from his home at Cameron. They did not realise that in this region, which does not average one white man to every area about the size of an English county, a fellow who has been thirty years on the Reservation must know everybody. The land is wide, but the community small. This seems to make for better human relationships than the opposite state of affairs, a vast community in little room. The genial Richardsons were disappointed for us that so many roads were not passable, so they packed off our children to their own ranch, towards the Grand Canyon, while they took us up the one road left in the Reservation, to see the Vermilion Cliffs. This road now crosses the sinister thick flood of the Colorado River over the magnificent new Navaho Bridge, a very impressive span indeed. We ate our lunch on the other side, not a stone's throw from the Colorado, on the way to a tiny remote valley

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

that had been for years a Mormon settlement and was now occupied by one rancher. And whatever may be said of the beliefs of the Mormons, they must be allowed to have been super-pioneers. They nosed their way into the most fantastic places, the wildest and remotest corners of this wild and remote country. In this they share honours with the Spanish fathers. It looks as if a strongly-held religious belief were the best possible equipment for a pioneer.

We returned along a ghost of a road from this tiny remote valley, where spring was holding a miniature green carnival among the scarlet cliffs, to drive through Marble Canyon, which does not suggest marble and is not really a canyon. It is a wide valley with cliffs on each side from a thousand to two thousand feet high. These are the Vermilion Cliffs. And vermilion will do, though actually they range from a deep salmon-pink to a sort of bright rust colour. The whole landscape there is Martian. If you were suddenly dropped into that region from any sensible countryside, you would assume that either your eyesight had gone wrong or you were out of your mind. Red roads, red earth, red cliffs, red mountains. It is like nothing you have ever seen before. In the brilliance of the afternoon sunlight, the two-thousand-foot vermilion ramparts were not to be believed, part of some inter-planetary adventure. All the way back, the cliffs glowed and burned until my incredulous eyes refused to look at them any longer. You might

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

have thought that next day, when we headed our station wagon away from the Reservation, towards the East, that ordinary reality would return. But it didn't. We moved like a whole family of Alices through a Wonderland. We ate our lunch just inside the colossal meteor crater near Winslow. The existence of this thing is yet another proof that Northern Arizona was created to be an assembly of natural marvels. That five-million-ton meteor simply had to land there. They say it arrived, at the respectable speed of forty miles a second, some forty thousand years ago, and promptly banged its starry nickel and platinum some thirteen hundred feet down, from which depth commercial enterprise, I am rather glad to announce, has not recovered anything but a few bits. I held one of them in my hand, and could see the end of my nose reflected in its highly polished surface (a mirror from the stars), and do not remember anything heavier for its size. We shall do well to escape any more meteors of that size and density, for if one of them landed on New York or London it would make our own determined attempts at mass murder look feeble. The whole countryside near that crater still looks as if it had not recovered yet from that horrible morning, forty thousand years ago.

In the afternoon we arrived at the Petrified Forest. In the neat little museum there they have nice ferns that are estimated to be one hundred and fifty million years old. That's all, just a hundred and fifty millions.

## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

There are also the petrified skulls of monsters of the Triassic Age, creatures that must have been about the size of a bungalow. These heavy-weights, which roamed the whole of Northern Arizona, had everything that Nature could supply but adequate brains, and though their various species lasted a long time, a much longer time than our own species has known yet, they had to go. Not enough brains. We have far more brains than they had, but we had better ask ourselves if we have enough yet. And we cannot say we have not been warned. The museums warn us. Here in this museum and outside all round it the wood-turned-into-stone was more than a curiosity and a piece of geological evidence; it was quite beautiful, especially that from the Rainbow Forest, which polishes into slabs of precious stone, and glitters like timber from some fairy-tale forest, which indeed is exactly what it is. When you go out of the Rainbow Forest you enter the Blue Forest, where you discover that the whole little landscape all round you is a delicate pale blue, with pale blue hills decorated with a neat maroon stripe. I have no doubt there is a sound geological reason for all this, but it seemed like downright enchantment. "A-ha!" cries Nature. "You think I can only do bright red landscapes here, do you? Well, what about this pale blue one, eh?" And you cannot reply. You can only stare, then pass on, wondering what comes next.

What did come next, and kept us up laughing until

past midnight was a middle-aged family of Navaho traders from Lancashire. We met them in an auto camp run by one of them on the outskirts of Gallup, New Mexico, which was the headquarters of the entire family. We met four of the twelve—two brothers, two sisters—and though they were Navaho traders of vast experience and knowledge, experts on rugs and the like, who had been there for over thirty years, they were also pure Lancashire. We might have been sitting in a boarding-house in Blackpool. The Far West, the mountains and deserts, droughts and floods, all the long years among the Indians, had not removed one single grain of their gritty Lancashire quality, which I know well, for I was born a neighbour of theirs, and my people share the same grim provincial outlook and the same North Country humour. They talked for hours about the Navahos, and swore that these remote Indians, originally out of Eastern Asia, had much in common with our own North Country folk. And why shouldn't they, for they tend sheep on lonely hills as all our folk used to do? One of the brothers declared emphatically that the Navahos and the Lancashire folk must be distant cousins. I could not accept this as a contribution to ethnology, but it is a fact that some of the stories they told me about the Navahos, especially those about the women, who are as merry and ribald in private as they are shy and elusive in public (and that is the best way for women to behave), reminded me of the frank



droll North Country tales of my youth. All the old traders we talked to liked the Navahos, who did seem to us the best of all the Indians of the South-West. They are an independent, cool, but poetical people. Our inventions leave them unimpressed. One old trader told me that when he first acquired a radio set he invited an elderly Navaho in to hear it. He turned the knobs proudly, telling the Navaho that now he was hearing New York, now Chicago, and so on. "What are they saying now in my hogan?" asked the old Navaho coolly, and when he was told that the machine could not penetrate into his home and eavesdrop among his women, he lost interest. And Mrs. Wetherill describes how, when automobiles began to appear on the Reservation, one old Navaho looked them over and finally observed: "These do not increase, as sheep and horses do," and cared no more about them.

It was rather a shock for us, after moving among the Navahos, to arrive at the more sophisticated Indian of the New Mexican pueblos, as we did now on our way to the train for the East. There are not many tourists at any time in the remote reservations of Northern Arizona. But in New Mexico, where tourists swarm and there are colonies of artists, the picturesque primitive has its price-list. We enjoyed Santa Fé itself, but it was an unpleasant shock to toil up the steep hill to the ancient pueblo of Acoma to find a very stiff tariff awaiting us: a dollar to enter

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

the village; five dollars to use a movie camera, something extra to look inside the church, and so forth. This was the primitive at Broadway rates. And the two rather ill-favoured young Indian women, who produced change with the leaden reluctance of a waiter in a night club, disliked us as much as we disliked them. They were nicer at Taos, which is a charming little town, but we looked in vain for any evidence that these pueblo Indians are the handsomest in the South-West, and began to suspect that the artists and romancers, including our own D. H. Lawrence, merely preferred what they had seen to what they had not seen. Our preference was for the Navahos, just as it was and is, among these states, for our Arizona, with its superior quality of distance and exquisite light, its fantastic vegetation, its mountain ranges that are lilac and amethyst in that lovely crystal air. A very ragged little regiment indeed, still with no luggage but our duffle-bags, we climbed into a tourist train at Lamy for Chicago; and as we went lumbering and clanking up the long slope towards Raton, we all knew that except in dreams we were leaving the West for a long time, perhaps for ever, that not for us would the sun light up the vast clear spaces, and that now we had turned again towards the crowded streets and the anxious eyes and the evil harvest of news. . . .

## XI

I HAD JUST BEGUN TO FOLLOW US ACROSS THE CONTINENT to New York and on board the *Britannic*, when the lunch-bell went, and I came down here to the dining-room. It is a fine large dining-room, but it would look more imposing if half of it were not occupied by a full-size but sadly warped ping-pong table. To-day I eat alone, for the older children have not yet come down to the island from their various schools or academies, and the others are out somewhere. The lunch consists of a little cold meat, a green salad, cheese and fruit. I mix my own salad dressing. In this family I am the salad-dressing expert. I have no grand secrets in my mixture, which is almost the simplest possible—olive oil (but it must be good), vinegar, salt, pepper, touch of mustard; and no sugar, no garlic, no other fancy ingredient. The trick is to put plenty of salt into the dressing, stir well, and then see that every bit of salad in the bowl has its share. When did the English stop taking an interest in food? Not, I think, until the early nineteenth century. Before that there is no suggestion that the foreigner will be better in the kitchen. People went abroad then for many things, but not simply to dine well. Indifference to food seems to have come in at about the same

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

time our fiction turned prudish, and probably both are the product of a bogus spirituality. But for many years now all classes in England have been eating badly. I have had disgusting meals in castles, manor houses, town mansions, villas, bungalows, cottages. Working people in most parts of the country no longer eat well. You see the women trotting off to buy tinned stuff. When I was a boy in Yorkshire, the food was very well cooked, but the general diet itself was badly balanced—too much meat and starchy tack and not enough fruit and vegetables—and those famous high teas brought about whole plagues of indigestion. The English would be a happier people if they ate better, I reflect; and I come to the conclusion that this pretence that food doesn't matter is one of our more dangerous weaknesses.

I try to glance through the morning papers, which I never see down here until lunch-time, while I am chewing my meat and salad; and I wish for the hundredth time that they would not inflict upon me columns of idiotic stuff quoted from the German and Italian newspapers. It does not represent public opinion; it does not even represent government opinion; it merely tells us what the Nazi or Fascists would like their public to think. A few lines would do, instead of whole columns. Why are the Nazis assumed to be brilliant propagandists? They are nearly always very bad. I could make out a better case myself against Britain and France than they do

And look how they have handled America, which the Nazis are under-estimating, of course, just as their war-lords did in 1916. What is depressing about the Germans is that they have the same grand dreams as before and are now making just the same wild mistakes. It is odd, too, that no people have done more than they have to make warfare a matter of cold calculation, and yet no people have preserved more romantic illusions about it than they have. It is just as absurd as somebody describing book-keeping by double entry in terms of poetry and love. It was not a German who began it, however, but Napoleon, whose mixture of cold calculation and hot rant has always seemed to me detestable. If superior mathematics and organisation will win the day, why drag in glory? If you see yourself as an eagle or a thunderbolt or blazing Mars, why send lying despatches and fake the bulletins? It is the double attitude that is all wrong. Even now the German mind does not seem to see this. You would think that their General Staff, losing their eye-sight from long peering at maps and estimates and logarithms, would never want to appear in public in uniform, but no, they strut and prance, glittering and jangling with death's-head insignia and medals, as if they were still hell-for-leather swash-buckling soldiery, only anxious to lead a forlorn hope. They cannot even claim any longer that they are playing with their lives, for now they only deal out death, like executioners, and take no more risk of it them-

selves than the nearest bank clerk or singing mistress. I wonder if in their heart of hearts these roaring military dictators feel themselves to be absurd hollow figures, for when all is said and done they are contemporaries of ours and their most inward stream of thought and feeling cannot be so entirely different from ours. And sometimes they seem to be shouting so loud in order to drown a little inner mocking voice.

I do not mind being alone like this, though that does not mean that I do not like having the rest of the family or a friend or two here. But I have to spend a great deal of my time alone, far more than most men. Except during the actual production of a play, I work alone, which means that a great part of nearly every day I spend isolated from my kind. I have never objected to going to plays and concerts and films by myself. When I am travelling in order to describe what I see—as, for example, when I was writing *English Journey*—I always prefer to be alone, for it is my experience that one notices more and is really more sensitive to the look and sound and flavour of things when solitary than one is with company. After a few days of this lonely travelling there descends upon me a mood of boredom mixed with melancholy, rather like that of Jaques in the Forest of Arden, and out of this has come some of my best work. Company makes me cheerful or aggressive, acting upon me instantly as drink does upon many men. But my habitual mood when alone is rather sombre and

brooding, inclined far more to pessimism than to optimism. That does not mean that I fake my writing when it takes on, as it so frequently does, a hearty, bustling, zestful manner. I am not trying, for ethical or commercial reasons, to cheer up the reader. But the thought of the reader, who has in fact arrived to keep me company, cheers me up. Nevertheless, if you are quick you can catch a glimpse of the rather melancholy background. I never have press cuttings sent to me and so am no authority on what has been written about me, but the only reviewer I ever remember who seemed to penetrate to my real self was the late Gerald Gould, in the very last review he wrote of a book of mine, towards the very end of his life, when his gentle, witty soul had almost ceased to concern itself any longer with our affairs. It was then that he wrote a sentence or two that flashed a lantern. And how rarely that happens! Thousands of sentences, stuffed with praise, blame, admiration, condescension, approval, patronage, but hardly ever a flash of the searching lantern or a ring of the bell!

Which turned my thought to something that has always amused me. It is the legend, which still persists, of the lionised; the golden legend that shines in the day-dreams of thousands of youngsters who are just beginning to write. Thus we still read both in newspapers and in novels how the author who suddenly makes a success is shot up into a new glittering world. His novel or play is the talk of the town; pub-

lishers, editors, or theatrical managers hang about his doorstep; famous hostesses beg him to visit them; vast sums are offered for any trifling service; heads are turned wherever he goes: he is the Lion of the Season. If any literary aspirant is being lured on by this nonsense, he or she had better stop now. Not only will all this not happen after *one* successful novel or play, it will not happen after ten of them. I have never known a writer who was being embarrassingly besieged by publishers, editors, theatrical managers, hostesses, whose life was made a misery by his or her admirers, who had to retire into the country or go abroad to escape the Juggernaut of success, who could not go here and there in London and other cities without all heads being turned and fingers pointed; and all such talk is fiddlesticks. In this country, where the smallest sporting event is a thousand times more important than the greatest artistic event, the newspapers now and then pretend that something of this kind is happening to a newly successful author, but they know better and the amount of space they allot to literature or any kindred subject shows that they know better. In order to divert their readers' attention from the places where the big money is really made, one group of popular newspapers has a trick of emphasising and at the same time immensely exaggerating the money earned by successful writers. We authors learn from them that we have just refused or accepted a sum of money for film rights that is equal to the total expendi-



ture of a film company on scripts for the current year. I remember once that a newspaper of this kind told its readers I must be making out of the Theatre a weekly income running into four figures. The truth was that at this particular time, when I had an interest in several dramatic ventures, my weekly budget was showing a loss of a hundred or two; and a little more of that astounding success would have left me broke. It naturally follows that a writer who has pleased a large public is better off and noticed more than he was before, but the rewards, both financial and social, are far from being on the epic scale suggested by the legend. What he does discover is that now he is expected to be at everybody's beck and call, to open bazaars for causes he never heard of, to send autographed copies of his works to complete strangers, to travel all day in order to entertain some remote literary or debating society, to contribute generously to any and every fund, and to write long letters of advice to any boy or girl who wishes to become a writer.

Nearly all these youngsters, I have noticed, seem to imagine that there is some magical trick, some enchanted backstairs, that will enable them to succeed in authorship. They will not face the fact, which I admit is a trifle dreary, that if you want to write all that you have to do is to spend a few pennies on paper and ink and sit down and *write*. Many of the qualities of an admired author may be gifts of the gods.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

No amount of will-power will help you to invent if you have no invention in you. Napoleon would have found it easier to conquer all Asia than to write one entertaining comedy. The sympathetic imagination necessary to the novelist or dramatist cannot be willed into existence. It comes from the mysterious depths of our being. Observation can be deliberately sharpened, perhaps, but to begin with you must have the gift itself. Nevertheless, although observation, invention, imagination, are necessary and come from the gods, even the possession of them may not secure the young author the position he covets unless he has another quality, which may not be heaven-sent, and that is what I may call intelligent persistence. Mere persistence itself—scribble, scribble, scribble, as George the Third said to Gibbon—is useful but not enough. It is important, of course, to keep at it, not merely to talk of what you are going to do, but to shut yourself up (which most eager youngsters hate to do) and really put something down on paper. Writers are not persons with the key to some magical backstairs, but are simply people who write. But persistence without intelligence may mean that the novice repeats all his mistakes, never learns anything, and so asks for disappointments. You have not only to keep at it, but always consciously to try and do better, after discovering where you went wrong last time. Then you are at least giving yourself a chance, and this is a great deal more important, though a hundred thousand dis-

appointed aspirants may cry "Never!", than other people giving you a chance.

When I was in my teens, working in a wool merchant's office in Bradford, I was one of a group of lively, intelligent lads who puffed their shiny new pipes at each other, walked the moors and dropped in here and there for a manly half-pint of bitter, and argued about life and literature until the moon fell out of the sky. We all wrote bits of things, but though I achieved print more often than they did (I sold my first article, for one guinea, to a London paper when I was sixteen), chiefly because I had more shots at the target, I do not think that what I wrote was any better than what they wrote, or that what I said about life and literature had any more sense in it than what they said. In short, I do not believe that I was the really clever member of the gang. Is it mere chance then that I have long been an author whereas now they are bank managers or schoolmasters or wool-buyers? (I do not mean by this that they are any worse off than I am. But there was a time when they would certainly have preferred a future of authorship.) No, it is not chance, nor is it a few strokes of luck. The difference between us was not in ability, but in the fact that while at heart they did not really much care about authorship but merely toyed with the fascinating idea of it, I cared like blazes. And I suspect that in any form of art, it is this caring like blazes, while you are still young, that counts. Because you care and the

dream never fades, other things, looking like those gifts of the gods, are added unto you. The very passion of the heart draws power. In some mysterious fashion, I suspect, you orientate your being so that such gifts as observation, invention and imagination are pulled your way. This explains why certain actors, from the Irving of yesterday to the Laughton of to-day, who begin with the gravest natural disadvantages, with obvious weaknesses of appearance, gait, voice, have ended as masters of their art. A mere desire for the rewards, no matter how constant and burning that desire may be, will not do the trick. You have to be fascinated from the first by the art itself, engrossed and spellbound, and not simply dazzled by the deceptively superior life of its successful practitioners. In this matter you have, in short, to be pure in heart before you can be blessed.

Here, I have long thought, both the religions and those spiritual systems that occupy the place of religions take too narrow a view. They are too exclusively ethical. They concentrate upon the Good at the expense of the True and the Beautiful. Their spokesmen are not unlike the cobblers who cried "Nothing like leather!" or those professors of philosophy who prove that the whole universe must have been designed to produce professors of philosophy. If many of these systems are to be believed, a touch of debility is a glorious asset. There is nothing in their theory to prove that any unselfish but sapless clerk or

pious governess is not worth a dozen Shakespeares or Beethovens. No allowance is made for size and richness of mind and soul. It is all too negative. Spirit is associated not with the inmost flame of life, whose absence is real death, but with a tepid indifference or fierce opposition to the flesh, which is given a supreme reality of its own. This may be because such systems come to us from the East, where good men were compelled to retreat from the glare and confusion and sensual riot of common life, in order to meditate at all. It is this retreat that is still being sounded. These last few years I have been snowed under with pamphlets and booklets, Christian, Buddhist, Theosophical, New and Higher Thought, in which mere rejection or a negative attitude of mind is assumed to be the beginning of a spiritual life. You are asked to lead the existence of a ghost, a feeble and attenuated parody of a life. Not one of them tells you to live eagerly and ardently like a poet. They turn the universe into a kind of boarding-school for debilitated little prigs. There is no place in their worlds, whether the material and fleshly here or the "spiritual" hereafter, for those battle-scarred giants of our race who have swung between passionate rebellion against the gods and agonies of pity and tenderness for their kind. Their authors do not understand that spirituality does not mean some tepid ghostly business round the corner, but the light in the mind and the flame in the heart. Even Aldous Huxley, in his *Ends and*

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Means*, seems to me altogether too negative. Nobody will march far under his banner of "non-attachment". I do not say that some persons ought not to withdraw, to refuse to join in, to save their souls neatly and quietly in seclusion, to acquire virtue by turning down a friend's dinner; but what I am tired of are systems in which only this type of temperament is allowed to flourish—if the term is not too flamboyant—and we are given to suppose that the universe is so contrived that no other persons will make any progress in it. There are more kinds of excellence in the spirit than they appear to understand. It is a house, as we know, of many mansions, and not every room is occupied by an ascetic examiner. That only the good can enter, I am willing to believe, but who are the good. . . . ?

## XII

AND NOW, BACK IN THE STUDY, I AM RETURNING TO a year ago, when we were all in London again, after America. I had agreed to let Roy Limbert and H. K. Ayloff produce a new play of mine at the Malvern Festival. I had always liked the idea of the Festival, but had not much enjoyed my two spells of it some years before, for under-rehearsed specimens of our centuries of English Drama, performed in a very stuffy theatre, can be very tedious, even when actors as good as Cedric Hardwicke and Ralph Richardson are among the performers. But now Limbert and Ayloff proposed to do six new plays, a most hazardous enterprise, and I felt I could not refuse to join in. But I had no play ready, and they wanted to begin rehearsals within a month or so. Fortunately I was fascinated by an idea that had descended upon me up in Rainbow Lodge. I would attempt to dramatise the mental adventures of a group of people listening to the first performance of a piece of music. It would be assumed that the music more or less controls their moods, but at the same time the progress throughout the play would be from the surface of the mind to deeper and deeper levels of consciousness. Towards the end I would try to present dramatically my feel-

ing, steadily hardening into conviction, that we are not really the separate beings we imagine ourselves to be. I would use the same "four-dimensional" method—in which a character appears to return in memory, to important scenes of his or her life, but the scenes, because of added knowledge, are now different—that I had already used in *Johnson Over Jordan*; but this play, unlike the other, would be comparatively simple in its theatrical requirements. And I decided to call it—clean forgetting that Huxley already had a book of essays with that title—*Music At Night*.

This experimental method is far more difficult than the conventional one of the "well-made" play, which, once you have laid down the main lines of action, almost writes itself. (I wrote *Dangerous Corner*, using mainly a cross-examination method, in ten days.) You are not carried easily along, taking a good deal of dramatic dead-wood with you, but you have to make a significant pattern of impressive little scenes, many of which would have served an old-fashioned dramatist as climaxes, the "big scene", to whole plays. And the writing has to be much better than the ordinary dramatic slip-slop. On the other hand, as the method was so unusual and difficult, I had to make the characters almost out of stock figures, easily recognisable types, because you cannot have everything new all at once in the Theatre or the audience will be completely baffled. So it did not take me long to assemble



## RAIN UPON GODSHILL

the characters and start the play going, but after that it was very hard work, and I had to do it against time, with one eye on the calendar. It had to be cast long before it was finished, and though the cast, with a few exceptions, was reasonably good, I could not help feeling uncomfortable. I fairly sweated at the piece, and once weakly telephoned Ayliff that it could not be done in time. He was so alarmed, for now the Festival had been announced, that I promised to have another try, and after a day or two's rest I grappled with the tortuous thing again. It was like wrestling eight hours a day with a gigantic eel. In the final scene, where I wanted to suggest the deepest level of consciousness, I used verse that the characters had to chant, sometimes singly, sometimes in chorus, and I soon discovered that after years of prose my verse, which did not pretend to be poetry but only heightened dramatic speech, was wretched stuff. I chopped and hacked and changed it about, with the production almost waiting round the corner, but it was still wretched stuff, and when finally the actors spoke it, which they did very badly, it remained wretched stuff. This whole enterprise of writing a difficult experimental play, with the minimum amount of time for reflection and revision, was a desperate business.

But not, of course, as desperate as the Europe to which I had returned. And this did not make it easier to work. What is a writer to do? If he shuts his mind

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

and heart, in order to concentrate on his own work, he cannot help feeling a self-centred and callous exquisite, fiddling while Rome burns. If he opens his mind and heart to the daily tidings of woe, to all the stress and strain of the world, he finds it almost impossible to work properly. And the postman, as well as the newspapers, will see to it that he does not forget what is happening, because every few hours, by every post, there arrive the appeals, the protests, the invitations to address meetings, the demands for more money. The very people who take him away from his work want him because he is a writer. If he had to stop writing, he would be less use to them. He would also have no money to contribute to all the different funds. Then after the newspapers and his correspondence have sketched for him twenty heart-breaking epics, he has to creep into his study and try to pump up more sympathy for his imaginary figures. If he has not to be sympathetic, then probably he has to be very amusing and gay, still remembering all the time that there are fifteen urgent cries for help that he has not yet answered. He sees every horizon darkening with armies, hears the roar of planes and thunder of tanks, and feels like a mad mouse.

There are worse places for a mad mouse than the Theatre. I would try and forget my growing dissatisfaction with British policy and to some extent with English life by advancing still further into the tiny crisis-ridden exciting world of the Theatre. No sooner

had I seen a rehearsal or two of *Music At Night* than I was writing, very happily and at a furious speed, a farcical comedy that came finally to be called *When We Are Married*. My wife had given me the germ of the idea when we were crossing from America, for she had found in the ship's library an oldish volume of French short stories, and one of these stories had amused her by describing how a couple who were celebrating the anniversary of their wedding suddenly discovered they had never been married at all. I had long wanted to write a funny play about the Yorkshire I had known as a boy, thirty years ago; so I took three couples instead of one, made it their silver wedding celebration, sketched in one or two scenes of genuine comedy (notably, that between Councillor Albert Parker and his rebellious little wife in Act Three, which is, in my opinion, good sardonic comedy), and then, trying to remember every droll thing about that old Yorkshire, I let it rip. Often I laughed while I was writing, not because I thought I was being very witty, but because memories of favourite words of that period, such as "flabbergasted", came back to me, and it was such fun introducing them all into the text. Actually, behind its farcical bustle, the little piece is not a bad sly sketch of provincial manners and attitudes. And I was disappointed that some critics—one or two of them North Countrymen too—failed to remark its undercurrent of genuine sharp satire, and I could not help wondering,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

somewhat wistfully, what they would have said if this had been an Irish—or even an American—play instead of a homely Yorkshire one.

It was about this time, too, that I was visited by two able and enthusiastic young men from the Westminster Theatre, Michael Macowan and Thane Parker, several of whose productions I had enjoyed. They suggested I should help to finance and direct a season of revivals, with a semi-permanent company. A fourth director was found in Ronald Jeans, who has a most disinterested love of the drama; and the four of us organised the London Mask Theatre, to offer London intelligent productions at less than the usual West End prices. In order that our patrons should not have to pay entertainment tax, the company was founded on a non-profit-making basis, so that though we could lose our money we could not make any. This meant more work and worry, but there was always something heartening about the enthusiasm of these young men and girls at the Westminster. As a reviewer of *Midnight On The Desert* profoundly observed, there is about me a certain charming or, if you are feeling like that, irritating naïveté, and now, like the naïve innocent I still am, I was astonished to discover that in this business of providing my fellow-citizens with an inexpensive intelligent theatre, to which some of us were devoting time and money we could ill afford to spare, there were plenty of kicks and hardly any thanks at all. We had

the greatest difficulty persuading the Press to give us a few paragraphs, to tell the public what we proposed to do. No doubt the name we had chosen sounded a bit "arty", but it was by no means our first choice and we had to find one that had not already been registered by former theatrical limited companies. But this was no reason why, in his notice of our first production, *Troilus and Cressida* in modern settings and dress, one of our senior dramatic critics should waste half his column grumbling at the name of our company. It is as if you had given a present to somebody and there came back instead of thanks a long complaint about the brown paper in which it had been wrapped. This thankless and grudging atmosphere, in which we began our work, mystified and depressed me; and though by now our company has made many friends and has already written a modest paragraph in theatrical history, I still resent it; and if the enthusiasm, in a country now sadly lacking enthusiasm, of the actual group at the Westminster had not seemed to me a precious thing, I would have told these grumblers and quibblers to organise their own theatre—or do without.

A further complication of my life then arrived with the charming person of René Clair, who for years had wanted to make a film out of a satirical novel of mine, *Wonder Hero*. Now it looked as if at last he had the chance, and so we had long and very entertaining discussions about the treatment of it. I had always liked

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Clair's work, especially the enchaning comedy *Le Million*, which I had seen over and over again; for he seemed to me one of the few film directors who were not trying to photograph novels or plays, but were creating their own picture of reality in films. Clair had an excellent sense of realism, but, rarer still, he brought a Latin wit into pictures. He could make a film the vehicle of a witty mind, and you felt that this mind could not have expressed itself half so well in any other medium. Unlike most Hollywood producers and directors, he had no epic delusions about the film. He did not imagine, as so many of them do, that the only way in which the film can forget its dime-show ancestry is to become huge, pompous, grandiose. Whenever I read in advance that whole towns have been built up and destroyed and thousands of actors employed in a film, I take care to avoid that film, for I do not want to spend a whole evening looking at rather dull illustrations to a long novel. I believe, as I said before, that a story film should have some of the thickness and authenticity of a documentary picture, but that nine times out of ten it should be a little thing, artfully conceived down to the last detail and with everything, the least shadow, made significant, and not a big blurred thing; far nearer—though these analogies are dangerous—a short story than an epic. Very different in temperament, though having much in common, and amusing each other all the time, Clair and I might have done something

really good with *Wonder Hero*, but now Clair is back in France, working hard, and probably this film will never be made. Although the films with which I have had anything to do seem to have succeeded, a curious fatality attends my more important film commissions. A treatment I wrote in Hollywood, several years ago, for W. C. Fields, has not been turned into a film yet, and the story of mine that I wrote for—and partly with—Alexander Korda, called *International Quartet*, describing the quarrel of four middle-aged bachelors, of various nationalities, who were members of a famous string quartet, is further from the screen now than it was four years ago. Sometimes I comfort myself with the thought that the gods in their wisdom have decreed that I must do other work, and so they contrive that I shall never be happy long in the dream kingdoms of celluloid.

So by the time I had to attend the final rehearsals of *Music At Night* at Malvern, which was busy importing more switchboards and electricians to cope with my lighting plot, I had my mind and hands full. We had also to cast *I Have Been Here Before* for New York, where it was due to open at the Guild Theatre in the early autumn. I had been looking forward, electricians or no electricians, to this Festival week at Malvern. The charming little town under the great green hills; good company at the hotel; a new production every night; all the fun and nonsense of the Theatre far from Shaftesbury Avenue and the stale

over-used air of a London August; an enchanting mixture of high art, social life, picnics on the Beacon. Some of it came true, but I had overlooked, in my romantic anticipations, the fact that I should be extremely worried about my difficult play, which needed more rehearsals than it could have under these conditions, that I am irritated and not soothed by the presence of autograph-hunters and really dislike being on show, and that only a production of the very highest merit, a thundering masterpiece, could entertain me or even keep me awake in a stuffy theatre after a sticky August day in Malvern. But this does not mean that I am disenchanted with the festival idea, for I feel I am still ready to follow the gleam, and I hope that Malvern will be crowded every August for years to come, no matter whose plays are being performed there. The notices of my own play, though not, with the usual exceptions, unfriendly, did nothing to release in me the holiday spirit. They took very little pains to understand what I was doing, and hinted that I was probably wasting my time and theirs. A height of silliness, overtopping the Beacon itself, was reached by the thoughtful representative of a London evening paper, who told his readers who must have some bewildering nights in the Theatre that I was trying to write like Bernard Shaw and, of course, not succeeding. If this critic were invited to see me shaving, I suppose he would also tell his readers he had just caught me trying to grow a beard



like Shaw's. True, the play itself went very well, in spite of some inadequate lighting, and the audience gave no sign of being bored and some of its members sent me very pleasant and sensible letters about the production. But I refused some courageous requests to produce the play at once in the West End, partly because I wanted to re-write it at leisure, and also because I had agreed that my other experimental piece, *Johnson Over Jordan*, must be done first.

This house in the island was filled with the children and their friends, but I saw little of them, for now we were rehearsing *I Have Been Here Before* for America, and *When We Are Married*, which was to go into the St. Martin's in October, after three weeks' trial in the North. There were also rehearsals of *Troilus and Cressida* at the Westminster. August fled, and now came September, the famous September of the crisis. Inadvertently I dodged the whole of the crisis, simply because I had arranged, weeks before, to be in the North, watching these trial performances of my plays. *I Have Been Here Before* went to Manchester. With Wilfrid Lawson and Eileen Beldon playing their old parts, but now with Ernst Deutsch as the German professor, and Lydia Sherwood and Eric Portman as the lovers, and with various little improvements in the production as a whole, the play seemed to me wonderfully well done, far better than it had been at the Royalty (though this is not a criticism of Lewis Casson, who had been called upon

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

there not only to produce but at short notice to play a long part as well, and he will be the first to understand that a second production can easily improve upon a first), and I do not think I had ever before seen a performance of a play of mine that gave me such deep satisfaction. I will here put on record, for what it is worth, that at Manchester this fine production did not pay expenses, and played to about a quarter of the money that Dodie Smith's *Dear Octopus* had commanded the week before; also that when this grand little company, with Lawson giving a performance to make your hair stand on end, did go to New York, the critics there, who appeared to have had a conference and passed a resolution concerning me, roared in chorus that the play was a lot of dreary nonsense, so that the mirage of a rapturous run in New York, which every American who had seen the play in England had promised, faded at once; and all that effort, all those grand individual performances and that fine *ensemble* playing, went almost for nothing, lingering now only in a few memories, my own, most gratefully and movingly, among them.

As soon as my Yorkshire tragedians moved out of Manchester, on their way to New York, my Yorkshire comedians moved in; and now as Basil Dean and I watched the play in the Opera House every night we could hear the news-boys crying outside. The audiences did not seem to settle down until nearly the end of the First Act. I was now busy re-writing the

play, so stayed on in Manchester, and then moved with the company to Blackpool, where they had to rehearse the new scenes all day as well as play the old ones every night. This was the week of the illuminations, and Blackpool was crowded, not with the usual Lancashire and Yorkshire working folk but with people from Scotland and the Midlands, mostly small, rather misshapen, toothless men and women, harmless enough, but very unattractive in the mass. The free-and-easy gusto that I remembered from the Blackpool of my youth seemed to have gone, and in its place was a kind of weary mindless quality, an empty idiocy, which was being exploited with ruthless efficiency by large-scale commercial interests. Anxiety about the crisis and all the work I had to do with my play may have made me feel impatient with this highly organised pleasure city, but certainly what I saw that week alternately alarmed and depressed me. There was not only no mind in all these antics, but there was also no heart. You could not feel that here was a free people enjoying itself in its own fashion. It was rather as if a mob of troglodytic slaves had been allowed to quit their toil for a few days. And you could not believe they were expressing themselves in these mechanical pleasures. There was no joyful spontaneity. These people seemed to have exchanged one cynical commercial routine for another. Because I used to like Blackpool and have praised it more than once in print, I made every possible excuse for what I

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

saw: it was the end of the season and so everything looked messy and stale; this was not the town's usual crowd; these people were probably just as worried and anxious as I was; and so on and so forth. But it was no use. Doubts that had been growing ever since I landed from New York now began to swell monstrously. During the little leisure left me after attending rehearsals and watching performances, I walked about with a bad taste in the mouth. In the fair-ground on the South Shore, in front of a large hall filled with mechanical devices that were supposed to be immensely diverting, there was a more than life-size figure that swayed and shook and roared with laughter, a most ingenious automaton. But I seemed to hear its harsh cachinnation, in which there was an evil mockery, wherever I went. As if the machines had sent an ambassador to this pleasure town, and there he was, laughing hideously all day. Perhaps he was shaking and chortling harder than ever that week, when there arrived the Appeasement of Munich.

It was this Yorkshire comedy that unexpectedly brought me, later in the autumn, on to the stage itself. Just as it was settling down at the St. Martin's, and I was busy again with *Johnson Over Jordan* and enjoying a successful revival of *Dangerous Corner* at the Westminster, there came the news, on a Sunday night, that our leading man, Frank Pettingell, had been involved in a collision and was in hospital in Canterbury. In the confusion and fuss of that Sunday

night I agreed to go on and play the part myself until a real actor, who would have to learn the lines and be properly rehearsed, could take it over. I had less than twenty-four hours' notice, and discovered to my horror that I had not even a copy of the play in the house. The part, which was that of a drunken droll Yorkshire photographer, did not call for any subtlety; it was a mixture of fruity character-acting and sheer clowning; but it contained scores and scores of lines that had to be very neatly timed, a certain amount of comic business, and in the Third Act, when such knots as there were in the action were being unravelled, it demanded some quick and sure work with the rest of the company. And it was the thought of this ensemble playing that terrified me, for I did not mind making a fool of myself for a few nights, but I was very anxious not to spoil my own play and the work of the professionals. I had spent hours and hours showing actors how I thought they ought to act, even teaching them inflections and bits of business, and, of course, I was used to appearing before the public as a speaker; but after all, I had never appeared on the stage before, and here I was, promising to take the place of a very well-known and excellent character actor in a leading part. And not at a try-out in some remote provincial town but bang in the middle of the West End! After I went to bed that Sunday night, I spent hours trying to remember the lines and the business and staring in horror at enormous gaps in my

memory. I came down in the morning with a little hollow place in my stomach, and feeling, as one always does at such times, that reality had somehow retreated, that nothing could be properly touched or tasted, that I had wandered awake into a menacing dream. The morning rehearsal was almost useless because all the Press photographers in London seemed to be in the St. Martin's Theatre, and everybody there appeared to be more anxious that I should be photographed rehearsing than that I should be really rehearsed. The afternoon was a little better, for I did remember most of the lines and movements, but I returned home, to pretend to rest for an hour or two, feeling like a man condemned to an early execution, a feeling obviously shared by the members of my household, who regarded me with a new tender solicitude. However, as we used to say in Yorkshire, it was "better nor like." Fortunately I am one of those persons who are stimulated rather than frightened and frozen by an audience. I am nervous at the thought of appearing in public, but when I am in front of actual people, fellow-human beings and not an abstract bogey, that nervousness usually disappears. My performance on that Monday night was not good, not because I was nervous but because I was completely inexperienced and had to learn as I went along. After several performances I knew a bit more, and I certainly did no harm to the play and the real actors. I have grumbled a great deal at the Press, so it is pleasant to put on

record that the critics who came did me proud as an actor, taking just the right tone of friendly chaffing approval. As an author I have never bothered my head about press cuttings, but as an actor I possess a little album of notices that I am prepared to display and boast about at any time. With such notices I ought, if the worst should happen to me as an author, to be able to earn a few pounds as a comedian.

I played exactly twelve performances. As soon as the next actor knew the part properly, I handed it over to him and clowned no more. Since then I have been asked over and over again if I enjoyed acting and if I should like to do some more. The truth is, I neither enjoyed nor disliked it, but found it a curious and rewarding experience. Long before I wrote plays myself, I found the Theatre and its folk fascinating. I have always felt that the miniature world of action and feeling in the little lighted area of the stage is profoundly symbolic of all our lives here in this world, so that the actor may be seen as representative of our common humanity. Work in the Theatre had brought me closer to the actor, but now, after being one myself, even if only for a brief space, I felt closer still, and much better able to understand the actor's problems and outlook, an understanding I hope to put to good use some time in the near future in a long serious novel. What surprised me most when I was acting was the odd way in which the whole day steadily worked itself up towards a climax that never

came. You climbed up to a peak that somehow was not there. You might reasonably expect the first rise of the curtain to be that climax, towards which a jerking finger of excitement had pointed. But no, it was not. Then you might expect with even more reason that the peak of evening would be reached during those moments when you stand bowing to the applause and the curtain falls for the last time. It must have been that you had been waiting for all day. But no, it was not even that. Nor was it for the friends who would come round to the dressing-room for a drink and a chat. Nor for the supper you ate afterwards. So you were left—or I had better be more accurate and say, *I* was left—somewhere in mid-air, off the earth but not soaring heavenwards, feeling queerly unsatisfied. I may have felt this more profoundly than real actors do, simply because acting is not my profession and I have another art of my own, but I am convinced that they too do feel this stress that is never quite relieved, this mounting voltage that is not completely discharged, this expectation that is never entirely satisfied, and that this explains, just as much as their professional use of emotion explains, their frequent lack of balance, their restless vanity and instability.

“Acting,” Huxley observed in his *Ends and Means*, “is one of the most dangerous of trades. It is the rarest thing to find a player who has not had his character affected for the worse by the practice of his



profession. Nobody can make a habit of self-exhibition, nobody can exploit his personality for the sake of exercising a kind of hypnotic power over others, and remain untouched by the process. Acting inflames the ego in a way which few other professions do. For the sake of enjoying regular emotional self-abuse, our societies condemn a considerable class of men and women to a perpetual inability to achieve non-attachment. It seems a high price to pay for your amusements. . . ." If Huxley is here comparing actors with saints, then one cannot quarrel with him. But when he brings the comparison down to a lower level, as he obviously does when he mentions other professions, he seems to me to be prejudiced and lacking discrimination. Let us admit that just as the stage door attracts all manner of unpleasant loungers and idiotic admirers, so the Theatre itself, especially in a country like ours where it is not an institution solidly planted in the community, where it has no official status and is regarded merely as a source of revenue, attracts all kinds of ill-adjusted folk, perverts and exhibitionists, the over-sexed and the under-sexed, triflers and fribbles and the like. There are two Theatres. One, about which most noise is made, is the tawdry temple of fashionable exhibitionism, for ever gathering together, either as players or playgoers, the foolish and the vicious. The other is the place where the ancient, difficult but extremely rewarding art of the drama is pursued, and I am afraid Huxley knows very

little about this art and its devotees. Many dramatists, directors, players, now have, so to speak, a foot in each Theatre; but every day we see them going over completely from one to the other. In this country it is long odds that most of them quit the art of the drama for the neon lights and the publicity and the expensive late suppers.

But players who have a deep devotion to the art of the drama do not seem to me to have their characters "affected for the worse." They are usually hard-working, kind, generous, with a quick imagination. Their self-exhibition, because it is open and obvious, part of their profession, and a mode of expressing their deepest feelings, does not seem to me so dangerous as the continued self-exhibition of a less obvious kind practised by some members of other professions. I prefer acting that I see in the Theatre to acting in the popular preacher's pulpit, in the Harley Street consulting-room, in the law-courts or the Houses of Parliament. The man who openly plays a character part for two hours a night, with a painted face in the spotlights, is more likely to remain in a healthy state of mind than the man who plays a character part day and night, using every room he enters as his stage. And though the ego of a good actor may be inflamed, I feel that this inflammation is superficial, only like the hysteria of a child who has been allowed to stay up too late and be admired too long, when compared with the deep-rooted tumours in the ego often found

in the profession to which Aldous Huxley and I belong. Hot vanity is better than cold conceit. Egotism is bad, but egoism is worse, and whereas actors are often egotists, I think authors are often egoists, giant spiders spinning webs of words out of themselves. Many writers live and work in a cold, self-centred and ungenerous spirit that is far worse than the foolish vanity and bad temper of the theatrical folk. Acting, like much writing, is probably a compensation for and release from the strain of some profound maladjustment of the psyche. The actor lives most intensely by proxy. He has to be somebody else to be himself. But it is all done openly and fairly and for our delight. The dangerous man, the enemy of non-attachment or any other wise way of life, is the born actor who has never found his way into the Theatre, who never uses a stage door, who does not take a call and then wipe the paint off his face. It is the intrusion of this temperament into political life, in which at this day it most emphatically does not belong, that works half the mischief in the world. In every country you may see them rise, the actors who will not use the Theatre, and always they bring down disaster from the angry gods, who like to see mountebanks in their proper place.

From comedy I nearly slipped into tragedy, for on the night of my last performance, when friends were crowding the dressing-room, word was brought to me that one of the children had to be operated on at once

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

and was even then returning from school in an ambulance. This operation was followed by another, a few weeks afterwards, far more serious, and our lives were narrowed to a sharp edge of anxiety. I cannot remember now what I did then outside the nursing-home. There was one journey there, when we were told to go at once, that was like a slow-motion journey in an intolerable dream. Space and time enlarged themselves monstrously. A yard was a mile and a minute was an hour, and everything one passed stood out in every detail and yet was not quite real. This sudden expansion of time can be very cruel. It makes me suspect this easy talk of "instantaneous" deaths. When I was buried in a little dug-out near Vimy Ridge, I heard the big *minenwerfer* coming when it could not have been more than a few yards away. It exploded on impact not more than a second or two later, but during that time a procession of fearful and despairing thoughts went through my mind and even then I seemed to have to *wait* for the thing and what I thought would be the end of the world. I remember that tiny fragment of 1916 better than I remember whole years. I returned to something like it, to being a suffering little lump of ego in a sudden vastness, during that drive to the nursing-home; but oddly enough, though perhaps it is not odd when one remembers that most serious illnesses have an hour of crisis, this turned out to be the beginning of better news and very soon we saw daylight again. I was able

to do a little job of film work, creating for Charles Laughton the outline of the crazy squire in *Jamaica Inn*, an outline that he filled in with some fine splashes of colour and character. Apart from Laughton's acting, the film seemed to me strangely dull, for all its sound and fury, as if the historical background had somehow robbed Hitchcock, a director with a touch of genius, of his usual effective and sinister inventiveness. I enjoyed working with Laughton and Pommer, but once again I could not help feeling that the enormous outlay of money and the huge organisation of the studio and all the hard work and the publicity and the general fuss were so absurdly out of proportion to the real size of the thing to be created. It is like seeing a brigade marching across deserts and over mountains, desperately going day and night, to bring back a box of toys. Or like men toiling at all hours for months only to bring out an issue of the *Boys' Own Paper*. And I am certain that it is a sense of this disproportion that keeps nearly all film people, for all their fine talk, secretly uneasy and makes them extremely sensitive to ridicule. They know very well that it is all a trifle absurd.

I was able, too, to keep a promise and go to Holland with the company from the Westminster in *Dangerous Corner*. Not acting this time, but merely doing a little introductory speech-making. This was just before Christmas, when there was a sudden cold spell, and in Holland it was the most bitter wintry weather. The

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Hague, where we stayed, was a frozen city, with a wind like a whip. We gave three performances, at Eindhoven, The Hague, and Amsterdam, and the Dutch audiences were surprisingly quick and receptive, far more so than the average English audience, and everybody was very kind to us. Before or after each performance I was presented with two enormous laurel wreaths decorated with red, white, and blue ribbons. I began to feel as if I were speaking at my own funeral. I never knew what to do with these wreaths, for they were too heavy and cumbersome to take away, and yet I did not feel I ought to leave them there. Yet though it is easy enough to smile at this embarrassing wreath business—and later the Netherland-English Society sent me some fine liqueur-glasses and a Delft decanter—these solemn and useless objects do symbolise an attitude of mind that is worth considering. For I felt in Holland, as I have felt in other foreign countries, that an author, and especially a dramatic author, is regarded as a much more important person there than he is in England. I think that English readers are as devoted to their favourite authors as continental readers are. But in English life, especially that semi-official life which is linked up with the more serious Press, the author *qua* author cuts a smaller and less significant figure than he does elsewhere. In the public procession he comes some way behind the politicians and diplomatists and senior civil servants and rich manufacturers and

popular athletes and racehorse owners. It is as if our national order of precedence had been jointly worked out by a stupid old snob and a schoolboy. You and your writing! These really important people, who mean something to the community, ask you what you have on the stocks now or what you are going to give them next time, all with an amused air, not caring whether you reply or not, as if throwing a question about her dolls to a little girl. The reason for this is that in England there are only three national spheres of interest, namely, the political, the financial, and the sporting, and if you can cut a dash in all three, if, for example, you are a rich political peer whose horse has won the Derby, then you are indeed a representative national figure.

I was still rewriting *Johnson Over Jordan*, and now Ralph Richardson had finished filming we could begin rehearsals. Basil Dean had been making his plans and assembling his experts for some time, and early in the New Year the long and complicated business of casting the play was settled. Apart from some journalism, which was forced upon me by a rapidly growing despair of the political situation, and a brief stay in Switzerland, where my daughter was passing her convalescence, I did nothing but nurse the production of this play, which I considered my best work for the Theatre so far. And the production was as costly as it was experimental. It seemed to me a good time to bring such a piece before the public, and I was

sufficiently bold or foolish to say as much in an article I wrote just after the play opened. The argument I used there was that a play on a very serious theme that set out to be deeply moving was just what was needed at a time when the tragic condition of the contemporary world, the suffering, the mounting tides of fear and hate, had left their mark on us. We are not machines or robots. We are not merely so much chemistry. Alcohol, bromides, aspirin and the like will not remove this deepening sense of stress. We are emotional and imaginative beings, and we had been going through whole months of emergency. We needed, I argued, some sort of release. The dictators understand this when they organise vast meetings and emotional parades for their people. I do not myself like this way of doing it. I think politics should be quiet and sensible, and I dislike and mistrust the emotional atmosphere of large political meetings, where every speaker is out to obtain the noisiest round of applause, and this is chiefly why I rarely accept invitations to speak at such meetings. A much safer and better way of release is through the arts, and especially through the communal and deeply moving art of the Theatre. But the typical modern English reaction to any deep emotional stress is to pretend that it does not exist. This has not always been our way, for there was a time when we were considered an emotional people, but about a hundred and fifty years ago our ruling classes adopted a pretence of being the



new Roman Stoics, calm-faced, steely conquerors. Wellington, with his habitual cool under-statement, was the type. The public schools learned and taught the trick. The Empire Builders carried on and widened the tradition. And now we are the unemotional race, so that some foreigners see us as chilly reptilian creatures, incapable of feeling. Actually we are a deeply emotional people, and therefore it is neither safe nor sensible to behave as if we were not. Now since the crisis of September, I pointed out, two courses of action have been popular and both have been wrong. The first course is to abstain, to go about in a mentally-numbed condition, and not to buy books, visit the theatre, look at exhibitions of pictures, listen to music. That a great many people have behaved in this strange fashion is proved by figures, which showed during the winter a most alarming decline. The second course is to insist upon having the front of the mind tickled, avoiding everything but trivialities. Bits of nonsense, it is imagined, will enable us to forget evil days. I am no enemy of bits of nonsense, and indeed have produced several myself, but to insist upon nothing else seems to me very unwise. It does not really work. You forget, perhaps, for an hour or two; but grim reality is waiting outside, and probably all the more terrible now because the severe inward tension has found no relief. In the end you do not feel better, you feel worse. I was frightened, I said, by this refusal on the part of so

many English people to seek out anything but the most inane trivialities, by this avoidance of what was serious, searching and moving. It is a genuine sign of decadence, half-way towards a declaration of intellectual and spiritual bankruptcy. A people living through such a time as this that will have nothing but Band Wagons and Crazy Gangs is a people already in decline. This is not the time, I concluded, to ask for a bigger and bigger flood of silliness, much of it set in motion by interests that do not want the people to think. Let us laugh, but let us weep too, so that we may find some release from the stress and pressure deep in our minds. We shall do what has to be done much better if sometimes we are purged and not merely tickled.

The play had a fate as fantastic as its own form. On the one hand, many of the critics, including some who liked most of my work, were obviously irritated or bored by it and said as much; the fashionable play-going people, who fill the more expensive seats and so make it possible for a production to run, stayed away as if we had the plague in the theatre; I have friends who are careful to avoid any mention of this strange lapse of mine from dramatic sanity; and after a loss of several thousand pounds the play did not achieve a hundred performances. That, I think, is a fair statement of the debit account. Now we will look on the other side of the ledger. The other critics, mostly the younger ones, declared it was the best thing

I had done in the Theatre. Some people came to see it over and over again, and even then protested bitterly when we took it off. Every post brought deeply appreciative letters, three times as many as I had ever had for any other play; and many of these letters came from fellow-writers and intelligent people of the Theatre and distinguished members of the professions. And all these people seemed to have received from the production what we hoped they would receive, a sense of vital experience, something quite different from a couple of hours' entertainment. Thus, the experiment had at once woefully failed and wildly succeeded. To millions, for whom it came and went unheeded, it had meant nothing; and to a few thousand it had meant a great deal. It had missed both the fashionable and the mob, but it had fairly and squarely reached a target somewhere between them, among that section of the middle-class that is interested in ideas and has some love of the serious Theatre. Unfortunately there are not a great many of these people and they have not much money to spare for playgoing, and this is a country in which the drama is thought to be unworthy of a subsidy, for all our boasting about Shakespeare. There are probably more theatres open in London than in any other city except, I imagine, Moscow, but most London playgoing has behind it no loyalty to the Theatre itself, no real curiosity about the art of the drama, no seriousness, only a desire to pass an hour or two easily or to

have a night out. The Theatre in England is not solidly planted in the communal mind. It floats uneasily in mid-air, a wobbling diaphanous thing. Officially it does not exist except for the purpose of being licensed and taxed, and it is probably classified with wrestling-booths and coconut-shies. Children at school are given the plays of Shakespeare to read and often to act, but when they leave school they soon discover that Shakespeare and his workshop, the Theatre, do not matter at all. "I do not see you," the judge will say to the barrister who is not properly be-wigged and gowned. England has plenty of theatres, but nevertheless it says to the Theatre: "I do not see you." If you retort that I am making too much fuss about the Theatre, for which you have never cared, I shall reply that here the Theatre is symbolic of many different adventures of the spirit, and that England now says too often: "I do not see you."

This was not a new thought, born of bitterness after my play had failed with the larger public. Some bitterness there was and is, and not all of it oozing out of the wounds of vanity. It is not pleasant to see your friends lose their money because they loved your piece, or to watch a huge company of good actors, dancers, musicians, melt away so soon after weeks and weeks of hard work, or to know that your leading actor, giving a performance that was itself a notable work of art, built up after months of thought and preparation, may never repeat it again; and to remember

that round the corner the whole lot of them, critics, fashionables, public, are busy cheering some tasteless and slovenly production, badly written and worse acted. But before I knew what would happen to my play, when indeed all the auguries were good, I had been lost in worrying conjecture about this country and had already set out some thoughts and feelings in print. I had felt ill at ease about us throughout the autumn and winter in America, and when I returned, a year ago, nothing that I saw and heard and read restored my confidence. There were others too, plenty of them, but not enough to fire the country, who were feeling as I felt; and there came from abroad, by every other post it seemed, in print or private letters unhappy confirmation. Something was wrong with England. And not simply because a group of Tories, still idly masquerading as a National Government, pursued a detestable and dangerous foreign policy. That was merely one effect. You have to grope in the dark tangle behind to discover the causes.

## XIII

UNLIKE many writers I know, I have no bias against my own country. I am not one of those people who are happy only when they have left their own land. I do not believe—as so many English and Americans do—that anything that happens in a foreign country is more romantic, charming, intelligent, gracious than anything that ever happens at home. I have travelled often and sometimes travelled far, and I have never been sorry to see the magical white cliffs again. In those boat trains from Southampton I have stared out of the window with tears in my eyes, not because the chop on my plate was half-raw and the vegetables uneatable, as they always are, but because I was seeing once again the misty trees and the gold-and-white scribble of the buttercups and daisies in the passing meadows. Nobody has praised more enthusiastically than I have the diamond light of the Arizona Desert, but it never catches at my heart as a certain light in England does, the light of a fine morning in June when every leaf or piece of blossom in the foreground is sharply vivid, but beyond them everything is gradually shading and melting away into what is in the far background nothing but an exquisite green tenderness. I say that this occasional English

light is not merely magnificent, like the one that you see nearly every morning in the American South-West; it is heart-breakingly beautiful, turning earth and air into music. No wonder we have had such poets. And then the people. Because they are my own people, naturally I prefer them to all others. But not all the English. We have some types that I detest above all others. But the ordinary folk here seem to me the nicest in the world. No people are more fundamentally decent and kind. Perhaps the Scandinavians and Dutch are just as decent and kind, but then they seem to me somewhat duller folk, without the odd twists of character and quirks of humour that colour the English common people. In the United States there are whole sections of the population that surpass the ordinary English because of their superior mental alertness, general vitality and feeling of independence. But on the other hand, there is still far too much sheer riff-raff in America, too many degraded types, too many cases of assault, rape, murder. If then I repeat that this island at its best is the most enchanting place in the world and that the ordinary people are the nicest in the world, I ought not to be accused of having any bias against my native land. It is easy to see which way my prejudices run.

But we should behave towards our country as women behave towards the men they love. A loving wife will do anything for her husband except to stop

criticising and trying to improve him. That is the right attitude for a citizen. We should cast the same affectionate but sharp glance at our country. We should love it, but also insist upon telling it all its faults. The dangerous man is not the critic, but the noisy empty "patriot" who encourages us to indulge in orgies of self-congratulation. This game is now played, in every country, by certain sections of the Press. The late Arthur Brisbane, who had a daily column printed in all the Hearst newspapers and was said to be the most highly-paid journalist in the world, gave the Great American People a dose of flattery every morning, and everything he saw, heard, touched or tasted only proved to him all over again the immeasurable superiority of this Great People. That is the trick; and a bad one. Mistrust any newspaper that is for ever showering compliments on its public. Journalists are not by temperament given to wondering admiration of the mass of their readers. Somebody must be cheating. In 1931, when there was more duplicity in high places and stupidity in low ones than I ever remember before, some of our newspapers almost foamed with praise of the British Character. While we were still on the gold standard, we were praised for our steadiness, courage, determination, good sense. When we suddenly went off the gold standard, we were equally praised for our realism, enterprise, courage, good sense. The fact is, of course, that such newspapers are now manipulated with an un-



scrupulous cynicism that regards all these paragons of steadiness, courage, good sense as so many million half-wits. There is about as much real love of country here as there would be conjugal love in a wife who encouraged her husband to go to the nearest saloon-bar and there stand rounds of drinks from morning till night. And everywhere, in every country, as the people are regarded with more contempt, so the tide of public flattery rises: the British are told how sturdy and sensible they are; the Americans how fortunate and independent they are; the French how clever and glorious they are; the Italians how brave and iron-willed they are; the Germans how noble and wise and terrifying they are; the Russians how lucky and unique they are; and a thousand million donkeys listen and nod and pull away at the cart, and do not hear, from behind the shafts, the scornful snigger.

Some years ago I published an uneasy sort of book called *English Journey*, which was a record, as honest as I could possibly make it, of what I thought and felt during a visit to most of the chief industrial districts. Our great organ of Tory opinion, after praising me very, very faintly for my vulgar, journalistic kind of book, rebuked me for exciting myself and trying to excite my readers about various national problems that had, it said, "exercised for years the minds of all right-thinking people in this country." Since then I have plunged into other and different kinds of work, gone here and there, especially to and from America,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

and have hoped that those right-thinking people, after so much mental exercise, were at last clearing up the mess. But I have felt uneasy, and each time I have returned—although I have always been glad to be back home—I have felt more and more uneasy. It began to look as if those right-thinking people were still having their minds exercised but only deep in their club chairs. The problems seemed to be there still, only now with a deeper despair all round them. We were still being told to be proud of all those good things here that we did not create ourselves but that were left to us by our grandfathers. Even our method of settling labour problems and our social services, upon which we had been complimented by the Americans, are after all the creation of the old pre-war liberalism. We may have extended and amplified these methods and services, but that is all. The real creative effort and the planning belonged to a world I could only just remember. But what creative effort were we making now? Where was our planning? Where was the noble national idea? We were always being told by those sections of the Press determined to be popular at all costs and to stop the people from thinking for themselves, how much better off we were than the people of other nations. And so we might well be, with more home comforts and fewer secret police, but what was the great creative idea that was inspiring us? Some of these others had theirs, and though what inspired them might not inspire us, some

of them, and especially the younger people, felt at least they had a goal and therefore could march with confidence. Even the Nazis could believe they were purifying and strengthening the race, removing from their Reich the disabilities imposed upon it by the Treaty of Versailles, and building up a strong and self-reliant Germany. Even the Fascists could believe they were transforming Italy, which they saw once as a country indolently living on its past, into a formidable great power, boldly planning for the future. I could not agree with these ideas, but I could see that they could act as a kind of yeast, leavening the public mind. In Russia the young communists could believe they were creating a new civilisation, in which for the first time in history the workers would reap the full harvest of their labour and the people would toil no longer for a privileged few. But where was our creative idea, what banner had we raised?

It was true that there was still alive in us, though not sufficiently alive in us, a sense of personal freedom, that freedom for which our ancestors fought mightily. Good! It was also true that we have inherited a wonderful tradition, of political and legal institutions, of literature, of domestic architecture and so no. Excellent! But what were *we* doing? It is simply not good enough to go on and on congratulating ourselves upon what our great-grandfathers did. We could not be satisfied with being mere inheritors, like useless young men waiting for rich uncles to die. But that is about all we

seemed to be doing. Were we really what so many acute foreign observers believed us to be—a decadent people? Was this country really like a rich but tired old man? I could understand other people thinking so, for to them we have so frequently shown that same gross, weary, vacant face. Indeed, in our recent political, economic, social life, here in the island itself, we have shown the same face. Not only have we had, for years, a rich-tired-old-man government, but behind that government there has been a rich-tired-old-man mentality. Yet I knew that at heart we, the English, were not really like that. And I knew too that if we should become like that, if every little flame of enthusiasm, every spark of creative energy, should be extinguished by the vast yawns coming from that weary, vacant face, it would be a tragedy not only for us but for the whole world. We have been—and still are, at heart—a great race, and we have virtues of our own, almost as hazy and hard to define as our charming landscape, that are perhaps even more valuable now to the world than they have ever been before. There is in us the stuff of which good wise citizens could be made, fit for the City of God.

Out of long security on our cool misty island we have brought some treasures of character. In a world splitting with hate, we are the poorest haters. We are a tolerant and kind people, and are that still, in an age when tolerance and kindness are harder to find every day. There still exists in us a deep vein of moral

idealism. Cruel things have been done in the name of the British Raj, but those things have always been hastily hidden away from the sight of the British People, as the full story of General Dyer's massacre was, for fear of their sudden anger. And the people as a whole will not move and march unless the cause is given some cover and show of nobility, which is what the foreign observer, aghast at such hypocrisy, hardly ever understands. In 1914 Asquith and Grey may not have been crusading for "gallant little Belgium"; but the people were, for I was one of them myself and I know. What the rest of the world often fails to realise is that we are a nation of idealistic simpletons frequently governed and manipulated by cynics. (We share this strain of thoughtless but genuine moral idealism, of course, with the Americans.) Then again, the English mistrust of abstractions and rigid first principles, the national attention to character rather than opinion, are assets as well as liabilities, and they are of particular value in the contemporary world, where division of opinion has created sets of people who regard other sets of people as inhuman monsters. The English instinct has always been to treat economics and politics as a mere part of a man's life, and to consider a man's economic position and political opinions as less important than his general character and not to be confused with it. Both Marxism and Fascism are opposed to this, and we see to-day with what result. Professor MacMurray makes

the same point at the end of his *Creative Society*, where he observes: “. . . the governing values of English social life belong to the field of direct personal relationships. As a result, the English can never quite succeed in taking their politics or economics seriously. Private life means more to them than public life, and by private life they mean not individual self-realisation but the social life which rests upon the free choice of friends and associates. Again we must insist that the form in which this expresses itself is largely conditioned by economic and traditional pressure. But it is none the less real . . .” You may declare that this attitude of mind belongs to yesterday, and that the realities of to-day can and will ignore it. But what about tomorrow? Here, in this temper of mind, it may be that there is a bridge that will take us from yesterday to tomorrow, from the end of one system of real communal life to the beginning of another and better one, safely across the iron and sterile gulfs of an enforced economy that has neither true politics nor community. In short, I believe the English to have qualities that would make it possible for the new society, which will not be Communism or Fascism or capitalist democracy, to make a beginning here. But not, of course, if the English are already in decline.

It may be objected that such a people do not need a creative idea, and that their strength lies in the very fact that, unlike the Germans, for example, they never

become slaves of the idea. They grow like trees instead of trying to erect themselves into telegraph posts. They are governed, as Santayana said, by their inner atmosphere, the weather in their souls, giving "a sense of direction in life which is virtually a code of ethics, and a religion behind religion." Very well; I for one am willing to drop all talk of the lack of any great creative idea. After all, I am myself a fairly typical specimen of this race, am far more intuitive than sharply rational, and am only too willing to change the barrack square for this high, misty, broken ground. Supposing then that I guess—for we will now say that guessing is my game—that there is something increasingly wrong with this governing inner atmosphere, with this weather in the soul, that the sense of direction is being lost, the virtual code crumbling, the religion behind religion becoming shadowy? If I had lived here without a break, hard at work and seeing only a small circle of friends, I might not have guessed so much or felt so uneasy. It is coming back, happy to be back, from the other side of the world, and then sniffing the air, that does the trick. And the foreign observers, after a visit or two here, notice something. Sometimes they write and say so. It is most disturbing when they write from a friendly and neighbouring democracy, as a successful professional man did from Holland, wanting me to do another and even fiercer *English Journey*. He had been over here recently, and, as a friend of ours, he was worried.

There was not, he said, the ghost of a plan, no general enthusiasm for a better way of living, but everywhere an apathy. He found our people kind and courteous, but—I give his own phrase—"extremely uneducated, indifferent to almost everything but sport." He saw "the complete destruction of a magnificent countryside," only to make room for an urban life that seemed to him monotonous when it was not downright horrible, as it appeared to him to be in certain towns he named. There was more of this, and I could not disagree with it, though I knew as a visitor he had seen the worst of us, for the best of our life is always hidden away from casual inspection. We are a people who live better in private than in public. But I doubt if we live very well any more in private. There is, of course, much dissatisfaction, for if there were not it would be all up with us. But it is not one great roaring dissatisfaction. It is in spots. Most of them do not show very much yet, though you can guess they are there because the very atmosphere is a trifle weary and stale. It sent some young intellectuals to their death in Spain. It makes the young poets write of bombs and barricades. In public we wear the face of the inheritor, not the creator. We have among us thousands and thousands of Bertie Woosters who do not know that Jeeves is dead. Because there is no standing still and the quality of our national life is not going up, it must now be going down. In every important department of that life, it seems to me to



be changing for the worse. You can feel it in the very air. There is no tingle of ardent creative life. The birds, which sing and build as well as ever they did, must wonder what is the matter with us.

Some deep-seated troubles, indeed the very gravest, we share with the world, but for once we can ignore them. Let us keep inside our island. There, our peculiar vices, which are complacency, hypocrisy, snobbery, stupidity, are flourishing. During the last few years our national life has been riddled with complacency, snobbery, hypocrisy, stupidity. Never before have we made such a fuss about trivialities. Never have we congratulated ourselves so often about nothing. If we all awoke one morning to find ourselves paralysed, some of our newspapers would congratulate us: "Let foreigners go moving about," they would say, smugly, "but the ordinary decent British citizen has wisely decided to stay in bed." Every possible triviality of mind has been encouraged, and anything likely to make us think and feel deeply has been discouraged. And this is not Hitler's and Mussolini's doing. It is our own. And as I see it, the rot set in when the post-war period ended in nothing, in making-do and muddling and cynical pottering as a substitute for creation. A tradition, based chiefly on a profound feeling of security but containing within itself certain valuable seeds of growth, perished in the summer of 1914. I am not myself conservative-minded and have no respect for the past, yet I do

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

not hesitate to declare that the England of 1914 was superior, in every important department of national life, to the England of to-day. But it had to go. For the next five years it was a matter of struggle and endurance, during which our loss of first-rate manhood was comparatively high and terribly damaging. But something much better, one felt, would emerge from all this. Our social system had had a good shake-up. The old snobberies were leaving us. Between them the young men who had fought and the young women who had worked would achieve something. They didn't, but there seemed to be plenty of time. After all, the weary men who came back had to start their lives all over again, as I know only too well, having been one of them; and the young women were anxious to be nice settled wives and mothers. The still younger people were immensely cynical and disillusioned. We achieved the post-war period, the Arlen-and-Coward-and-night-club era. Throughout this period the elderly men of the ruling classes were quietly working out the very difficult problem of putting the date back to early 1914. They did not really notice anything happening in the world after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Significantly, this was the last event that meant anything to them. Just before the gates of their minds closed to all new and profound impressions, in slipped a terrible figure, dripping with blood—the menacing Red. This then was the post-war chaos, which lasted about ten years.

At the end of those ten years or so there should have emerged a New Britain, with much of its old leisurely charm gone for ever, robbed of many an antique grace, but alert, purposeful, courageous and richly creative both politically and culturally. And it didn't. Instead of going forward, the country halted, hesitated, wobbled, then tried to move backwards. What should have been an advance turned into a retreat. English political life, which had not been improved by the Khaki Election of 1918, slipped down to a new low level in 1931, the year of the faked financial crisis, of the Labour Prime Minister who turned Tory overnight, of the bogus National Government, of an election swung by the nastiest lie yet, the one about the Post-Office Savings raid. My own feeling is that English life, political, social, cultural, took a turn for the worse about then and has shown little improvement since. It was now we began to see ourselves wearing that gross, vacant face of the tired rich old man. And brightness fell from the air.

Our commonest error of speech is our description of this country as a democracy. It is not a democracy and never has been; though it is worth observing that it is farther away from true democracy than it was twenty years ago. Indeed, I think we were nearer to being a democracy back in 1912. Just after the War it did look as if we were about to say good-bye to feudal Britain for ever, but very soon the ranks of privileged persons closed up and common people had

to keep their distance. Neither politically nor socially is this country a democracy. Hardly anybody here thinks or feels like a democrat. If you begin to talk like one in public, there is a rumpus. There is more of a rumpus now than there used to be. For example, there was a time when public men openly declared themselves republicans. How many dare do it now? Very well then, we are not a democracy, but are we any the worse for that? Do we not derive our strength from the slow growth and development of our forms of political life? Is not this our famous English way? We have forms and institutions of immense value that yet cannot be accurately defined, because they have grown like trees. So much is true. But if you begin to see cracks everywhere and smell rotting wood, it may be that all is not well with the trees, that the sap of life is not flowing freely. A traditional way of doing things must have at the centre of it a spring and fountain of rich instinctive life. The traditions are with us, but are the spring and fountain what they were? The retrogression of recent years does not suggest they are. Nor does the faint smell of decay in our atmosphere. So let us stop complimenting ourselves out of our history books, and see what we really are at this moment.

We are not a democracy, but a plutocracy roughly disguised as an aristocracy. All our real government is done by the Right People. Not only in Parliament, to which I will turn soon, but in all the various posi-

tions of authority, in the Civil Services, Finance, the Church, the fighting services, and so on. There is always a steady pressure exerted to maintain in all these posts the Right People. In other countries, as we are fond of pointing out, they are very crude about this kind of thing. When a political party comes into power, all the good jobs are dished out to "the boys" and no nonsense about it. Here we go to work with more subtlety than that. Nothing is said here about "taking care of the boys." All we hear are faint rumours from on high about the necessity of "finding men with the right background," "maintaining the best traditions," "good public school and university types," and so on. The result is that twenty-nine times out of thirty the Right People get the jobs. You can, of course, wangle your way in, if you have the brains and the push, just as you always could anywhere, except perhaps under the Laws of Manu. But in order to gain admittance, it is twenty-nine to one you will have to behave exactly like one of the Right People. Every inquiry only shows us from what a high and narrow source nearly all our governors spring. Except, you may say, in Parliament, whose members we elect. But this only means in practice that every few years we are free to choose one of several candidates. And the game is so rigged that unless we are very careful indeed to keep him out, the winning candidate will be one of the Right People. Our election methods are out of date, and so are all

in favour of politicians who are also out of date. To begin with, the Parliamentary seats are not equitably divided among the population; the present division favours the smaller and older towns and country districts as against the large industrial boroughs; so that a vote in Cheltenham is worth much more than a vote in Coketown. Then again, because we have not proportional representation, millions of progressive electors never put a member into the House. It was estimated, after an election some years ago, that in one part of the country, which was represented in Parliament by eighty Tory members and one solitary progressive, the actual proportion of votes had been a million and a half for the Tories as against a million for the progressive parties. Public opinion was one-and-half to one; representation was eighty to one. These anomalies are always in favour of one side, and that, of course, is the Right Side. Again, even among the Tory candidates there is some grumbling because in many constituencies a candidate will not be adopted by the local Conservative Association unless he agrees to make a large contribution towards his election expenses and then pays a handsome annual tribute to the local party. In short, he cannot enter Parliament unless he has a substantial private income. The result is that Parliament has a quite disproportionate number of members who have substantial private incomes and cannot help having a private income point of view.

You can see the private income outlook at work. It does not by any means necessarily coincide with the best interests of the country. There is a natural tendency to suppose that whatever protects the drawer of dividends is sensible and wise. These men are probably quite unlike the heavy villains of capitalism who figure in the Left Wing prints. But they cannot help seeing things from their own narrow angle. Moreover, being men of financial substance, perhaps born to it, they are apt to live in a style that cuts them off from the mass of the people and probably brings them into contact with a small, wealthy and privileged class. What is worrying some agreeable fellows at the club, some nice chaps from the City, will soon begin to seem much more important than whatever happens to be worrying a hundred thousand poor devils somewhere in the industrial regions. And as four newspapers out of five are owned and directed by the same sort of people, it follows that the weaknesses of such political gentlemen will not be mentioned and corrected by most of the Press. All this explains in part why quite nice but rather stupid fellow-countrymen of ours can behave in a fashion that makes the simpletons of the extreme Left see them as deeply scheming villains, planning to dragoon and starve the people.

Unless we are fortunate, then, we are not really free to express ourselves politically even at elections, and there are not many elections and between them we

have only the ghost of political power. That we were once a little more of a democracy is shown by the fact that there still lingers some faint trace of Government sensitiveness to public opinion, but anybody who cares to examine in detail Baldwin's handling of the electorate in 1935 will see that genuine representation of that opinion has become a mockery. And now, in the new style of doing things it is not even Parliament, not even the Cabinet, but the Prime Minister and two or three of his chosen senior Ministers, who make all the decisions for us. We do not know until long afterwards what those decisions are. We may not be compelled to make a fancy salute every time Chamberlain passes us, and the secret police do not come round to see that we are carefully listening to him on the wireless—and if that means democracy, then we have one—but the fact remains that we ordinary English citizens have known no more about what Chamberlain has been doing than the Germans and Italians know about Hitler and Mussolini. Baldwin taught us the first lesson in the new politics during the Abdication business. He went about this with no more reference to our opinions than if he were Cromwell. He then handed us over to his severe head pupil, Chamberlain, who has peremptorily demanded our sympathy without giving us the least bit of information about what he was doing. *The Times*, a newspaper now remarkable for its quiet effrontery, adds its demand that we should not even



mutter a word of criticism. Heaven has seen fit to bestow upon us as our supreme lords no less than Neville Chamberlain, Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare, and all that we must do is to pay up promptly and sing hymns of praise. Moreover, all manner of mysterious personages, such as Sir Horace Wilson or Sir Montagu Norman, men whom nobody elected and who are not answerable to the public at all, are sent here and there, representing us, and appear to be given the most extraordinary powers. Meanwhile, we are expected to gape and admire and then foot the whacking great bill, so that when we are not being treated like babies, we are being handled as if we were some drunken old fool at a disreputable night-club, with people all round us ordering what they want and passing on the charges. Our grandfathers, who were usually men of public spirit, will be tumbling out of their graves soon to hold indignation meetings.

How is the trick done? How are we persuaded that we are still even a semblance of a democracy when all the time our actual methods of government are less and less truly democratic? First, I think, the Right People are kept securely planted everywhere. Then, just before and during a General Election, the crowd is artfully stampeded. Between elections, it is assumed, with growing reason, that a great many of our people are losing, if they have not already lost, their political sense; and that many of us are too

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

worried and tired, or too much occupied with the wireless set or the new car or the football pools, to be active members of a real democracy. We must make no mistake about this. Democracy is no political creed for tired or thoughtless men and women. This is the chief reason why it has failed absolutely in some countries, and notably those countries that suffered most from the War. When we are nervous, tired, or dreamily pre-occupied, we do not want to have to make decisions. It is easier to hand over all responsibility and simply obey orders, just as it is much easier to be a good soldier than a good citizen. There was a time when our senior Ministers tried to impress it upon us that they were busy doing what we wanted them to do. But now they merely ask us to leave it all to them, and tell us not to worry. As if we were invalids in a nursing-home and they were relatives who had taken over our affairs. They talk like this now, because they believe that politically most of their electors *are* invalids, without energy and volition, only anxious to be quiet. And it looks as if they are probably right.

Because the typical English mind mistrusts clear-cut formulas, a logical pattern, severely rational boundaries, and likes to move delicately in a slight haze; because we distrust definition, probably because we distrust the intellect, believing in instinct and intuition, getting the "hang" or the "feel" of what we wish to understand; and because we prefer to see

our institutions grow like trees, slowly suiting their shape to the prevailing winds of circumstance; it is dangerous to deal with English life in separate compartments, for everything here shades off into something else, the political into the economic and the economic into the social. All you can do is to plunge in, risking the charge—which I am always ready to meet with equanimity—of wildly generalising. You are bound to make mistakes, but here and there, as you career through the haze, you will run slap into the truth. Now the first thing you notice in the English scene is the Crown, and the honest democratic examiner and critic of that scene is at once in a trap. For you cannot be an honest democrat and declare that what is very dear to the people should be taken away from them. And it would be absurd to deny that the ordinary people not only in Britain but in all the dominions of the Empire have both a reverence and an affection for the Crown. The Press has helped to create that reverence and affection, especially in their earlier stages in the years following the War, but when we come to more recent years it would be truer to say that the Press has merely reflected an interest rather than manufactured it. Nobody compels the people to turn out by the hundred thousand and cheer, as they do, anywhere between Windsor and Winnipeg. The Crown is no more imposed upon the people than beer and football and films are imposed upon them. All the evidence points to nine out of ten,

among the poor as among the rich, possessing this reverence for the idea and affection for the persons of Royalty. And it is not hard to understand why they should. The Crown has little direct power, so that it cannot be blamed if anything goes wrong. On the other hand, it remains as the symbol of supreme executive power, and is the most attractive kind of symbol, nothing abstract, nothing remote, nothing intimidating, but some nice, kind, smiling people, for ever surrounded by impressive glittering paraphernalia and pageantry, living a mysterious life in palaces but also for ever coming out and behaving like friendly fellow creatures. The combination is irresistible, and the most able president with the most charming wife and family can never hope to compete with it. There is as much difference as between a rather shabby string quartet playing in the street and the full band of the Grenadier Guards.

Unless then you believe in a rather ugly dictatorship by a small and ruthless minority, you cannot advocate the abolition of the Crown. But why should anybody want to abolish it? It is represented now by persons whom it is difficult not to respect for their determination to do their job as well as it can be done. To this my own answer would be—because the existence of the Crown largely holds together a kind of social pyramid of which it is the golden apex. It is true that in other monarchies this pyramid has tumbled down and royalty itself has been demo-

cratised. But only in small and not very wealthy countries, whose homely capital cities are not the centres of vast empires. It cannot be done, for some years to come yet, in Britain. And the trouble is that this social pyramid, up and down which we English climb and fall, is in the light of any real values nothing more than a gigantic sham. And the father of shams. It represents a system that has long ceased to work for the country's good, and now that it has closed over us again instead of being dissolved into clean air, it is really responsible for some of the worst features of our national life. If the whole pyramid were a fake from top to bottom, then it could—and, I think, would—be destroyed very soon, but, unfortunately, the apex, the Crown, upon which millions of reverent and affectionate looks are bent, is genuine enough. The Crown admittedly represents a rather fantastic English compromise about which there are few illusions, and it is what it is. The throne is not offered to the highest bidder. A gigantic coup on the Stock Exchange will not give a man a chance of becoming master of Buckingham Palace. But immediately we come down the pyramid, the pretence begins. We find a plutocracy pretending to be an aristocracy. We are in an unreal world of masquerades and disguises. And one sham breeds or encourages another. Out of the mass of them come mental dishonesty and hypocrisy. Thus in many departments of our national life we have lost the virtues of an aristocratic system

and we have not arrived at the virtues of a democratic one.

You will often see advertisements in the Personal Columns of our more dignified newspapers that are a tiny example, one of hundreds, of this mental dishonesty. In these advertisements titled ladies offer, for a handsome recompense, to introduce young women to the London Season. This is typical of the false little world we have created here, and it could not happen anywhere else. In a true aristocracy a lady of title would not offer her social privileges for sale. In a true democracy those privileges would not be worth buying. But with us, nowadays, this muddled bargaining goes on all the time. One section of our society sells what should not be for sale. The other section buys what is worthless just because it can be bought. The only reality in such a transaction is the money that changes hands. Again, consider that now familiar figure in London, the fashionable journalist who cashes in on his or her social status and becomes a guest with a notebook. If a position in what used to be called Society means anything, it ought to mean that you do not make copy out of your private engagements. If such a position does not mean anything, then why is it given even this cash value? We return to the same dishonest muddle. What is sold is the very thing that can never be worth buying. For years it has been the custom in the City to have "guinea-pig directors," usually with titles, on

the boards of companies, simply to attract investors. Why investors should be reassured by the presence of a title is a mystery, for clearly the holder of such a title has now said good-bye to the very quality that might once have made his presence reassuring. It is the same with new titles, honours. From the moment it was known that honours could be bought, they should have been laughed out of existence. What is the sense of handing over a counter, as if it were a pound of tea, membership of some noble-sounding order of chivalry? Why should rich men be encouraged to disguise themselves as feudal barons? This is called keeping up a tradition. It is no more keeping up a tradition than the auctioning of old armour can be called knight errantry. It is prostituting a tradition. This is a real country, where men and women have to live their lives, and not a vast fancy-dress ball. We are humbugged day in and day out by this medieval masquerade. It prevents us ridding ourselves of the House of Lords. There is something to be said for a Second Chamber in the Legislature, but no more to be said in favour of our present House of Lords than there would be in favour of having battalions of bowmen in the army.

The tradition of a feudal aristocracy and landed gentry hangs over our life like the pall of smoke over wintry London. It is this that prevents so many of the English from behaving like grown-up persons. Our periodicals are filled with nonsense about rich

idlers, and there seems to be more of it every year. The other day a London evening paper devoted a whole page to a feeble description of how four fashionable women went to a party. People have only to be rich enough and in the swim to be credited every other day in the Press with the impressive qualities. This one is beautiful and witty; that one is handsome and clever; the other one is charming and wonderfully cultured. As year follows year and the world changes and whole populations reshape their destinies, we in England are still being invited to watch these persons contrive, so elaborately and expensively, to pass their time. The country house routine, with its solemn arrangements for slaughtering creatures at stated seasons, is regarded as one of the great goals, life at its fullest. Our more energetic, acquisitive, cunning citizens will scheme and toil half their lives in order that at last they may change their names and lead this fancy-dress existence. Their children have hardly heard of the dark towns from which the money came. And the towns themselves, where the muck remains, reap no harvest, not even of dead pheasants. One reason why provincial urban life here strikes a foreigner as being dreary and rather barbarous is that nobody capable of making much money settles down to be a citizen. The landed gentry tradition is too strong. Off they go into the country. The directors go first, and then the managers and cashiers, if they can afford it, follow them. One of



them is asked to dinner by a peer. A baronet has nodded to another. The County may be calling. A little rough shooting, eh? What about the Hunt next season? And Coketown is nothing but a distant blur of smoke, and its long dark streets are forgotten. I do not say that there is not in many of the English a genuine deep love of the countryside, which naturally hurries them out of the industrial towns. But always, over and above this, there is the lure of this absurd tradition, this retracing of the feudal pattern, this gigantic pretence.

We are apt to consider the Americans crude folk and often think of their millionaires as mere industrial brigands. But at least some of these millionaires have spent their money where they made it, giving their native towns and townsfolk all manner of excellent things, from institutes of scientific research to symphony orchestras. Such benefits are not entirely unknown here, but I will wager that fifty times as much money is annually spent here on this semi-feudal nonsense, in imitating the habits of the landed aristocracy. The Americans have gained immensely by their complete freedom—except in a very few places—from this tradition. And it is the gravest mistake to imagine that all this infantile activity, based largely on a pretence of values that no longer really exist, is of no importance, for its political, social, cultural consequences have a wide significance. Round this tradition and this activity is built up

an enormous edifice of interest and admiration that takes in almost the whole nation. And while everybody is still gaping or cheering, no awkward questions will be asked. If you cannot become a racing peer yourself, you might be allowed to shake one by the hand. Your wife may be accepted by the County. We often forget the tremendous influence that their wives have over men of affairs, too busy while they are making money to trouble their heads about social matters. Such wives often happen to be arrant little snobs. The appeal to women of this tradition can hardly be over-estimated. It is their sirens' song. Very few of them, if they have the money, can stop their ears. What happens, time after time, is that if the husband is successful, the wife has her way, and very soon there is a new social life for them both. They are promoted from the people to the Right People. And what is merely social to-day is political to-morrow. All this happens almost all the way down the pyramid. This foolish snobbish tradition runs through our national life. And it is one of the greatest recruiting forces for an intolerant and ungenerous Toryism.

As soon as anybody is really successful in this country, whether he is a man of business or with a profession, there is brought to bear upon him a soft, slow, but steady pressure towards the Right. He is taken up and smiled upon by the Right People. They give him to understand that he is one of them. And three times out of four, at least, the trick works. After

it has worked, though this successful man may have come from the common people, may owe his good fortune to the affection of the common people, he is lost to the common people. At heart he has done with them. Thus was a rather vain romantic like Ramsay MacDonald artfully be-glamoured, with most unfortunate consequences for his party and his country. And this process continues all the time. Even authors are not ignored, if it is thought they might be useful, though the tendency is to regard authors and similar folk as comparatively unimportant eccentrics. One reason why, I think, we feel that in France there is more respect for intellect and artistic genius than there is here is that France no longer suffers from such a false semi-feudal tradition, with its admiration of grown-up schoolboys. This snobbery and elaborate sham of ours, this impudent disguising of a plutocracy, this pretence of values that no longer exist, they not only have bad political and economic consequences (for which, as one example out of hundreds, see the indictment in the early chapters of Garratt's *Shadow of the Swastika*), but they encourage a general mental dishonesty. They blur the edge of intelligent criticism. They put before people trivial and unworthy ends. They promote an indifference to the life of the mind and spirit. Free of them as a people we shall be not only more honest but immediately easier, gayer, and more intelligent. The air will not be so thick and stale with mysterious and idiotic

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

taboos. There will be far fewer inferiority complexes hard at work. People who still seem mere specimens of a class will turn into real characters, genuine folk. We can let ourselves go more. Too many English are terrified of appearing vulgar to the superior beings of the class above theirs or of appearing undignified to the members of the class below. But life is sufficiently complicated without introducing into it a lot of nonsensical values. They and everything that goes with them should be swept away. If all manner of quaint old traditional things will have to be swept away too, we must make the best of it. After all, there is always the Theatre, the films, and the local pageant.

The result of such a clean sweep would be the beginning of a bourgeois democracy. I do not use "bourgeois" in the Marxist sense—for I think such a democracy here would soon adopt a liberal form of socialism—but in the older and more social sense. Using our present phraseology, it would be middle-class. This would suit me. Words like "bourgeois" and "middle-class" do not frighten me. Why should they? I am essentially bourgeois and middle-class myself. I should like to see one section of our present society brought down a bit, and another and much bigger section raised up. I am on the side of the workers, the masses (that most insulting term), the proletariat, but I do not believe that there resides in them some mystical virtue that will somehow become

the leaven of a new and greater culture; just as I do not believe that the art of literature has taken an immense step forward just because a few not very good novels about communal cement works have been published. When they are not tangled up in snobbery and false values, the ordinary English bourgeois middle-class are grand people. Not long ago, reading Louis Bromfield's novel about India, I noticed that he was very severe upon us middle-class English, commenting sharply upon our drabness, lack of imagination, dreary respectability, and so forth. These charges are true, but not the whole truth. These faults in us arise partly from our consciousness of being a class in the middle, not so good as the people above us, better than the people below, an acute social (not economic and Marxist) class consciousness. The drabness and respectability and *apparent* lack of imagination are partly born of fear, that is, constant fear of looking foolish to the upper-classes and appearing undignified in the eyes of the lower classes. When they are free of all this, the bourgeois English show themselves to be made of grand stuff. Let Louis Bromfield name any other single *class*—not a nation, but a section of a nation—that has given the world as much as this despised English middle-class. Why, these dreary pigmies have produced giant after giant, and if you call the roll of them, beginning with no less than William Shakespeare, the wealth of great names and lasting achieve-

ments, especially in literature, science, invention, law, is staggering. Take away the contribution of this drab and unimaginative class and see how much poorer the world looks. And once out under a clear sky, their own men and women, free of all these webs and mists of false values, these bourgeois English will be citizens fit and ready for noble cities.

But we must return to things as they are. Let us have a look at the two Englands in the economic world. There is England the producer of goods. And there is England the lender of money. From the standpoint of the happiness of the people, the first seems to me the more important. Unfortunately it is rare to examine national policy in this particular light. Very few political persons keep steadily in the foreground of their minds the one real test for any national policy, which is—Will it benefit the people and improve their life? This looks like our old friend of the Political Science text-books, Utilitarianism; Jeremy Bentham and his “greatest happiness of the greatest number.” I know very well—or I did know when I still remembered the Political Science they taught me at Cambridge—that this greatest happiness of the greatest number is philosophically no impregnable fortress. The Oxford Hegelians passed many a happy hour sapping and mining and then blowing up its foundations. But these same metaphysicians proved, with exquisite reasoning, that when the State proceeds to take away your liberty,

you are not really losing your freedom but are being turned loose into a "higher freedom"; and now, having seen this process at work, we all know what that "higher freedom" means. Equally suspicious, not in their purely philosophical but in their political and economic aspects, are the attacks on the Utilitarian test of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The learned Tories who have told us that it does not mean anything know just as well as we do what it really means, that is, as a rough-and-ready test of practical policy. They know what it means, and they are against it. The typical Tory mind is suspicious of and not hopeful about humanity in general. It belongs to a person who feels fairly comfortable and is convinced that any change must be for the worse. What, stop hanging people for minor thefts! What, reform the constitution, the electoral boroughs, the voting system! What, remove child labour from the factories! What, begin educating everybody! So it goes on, from generation to generation, protesting that any generous measure, based on a hopeful view of human nature, means ruin. Only a day or two ago, a whole conference of Tory women protested vehemently against the abolition of flogging in prisons. It is the same old mind, the same old suspicious temperament. If you corner the average Tory he will admit that his kind were wrong in the past, that all the reforms they first opposed so vehemently turned out well, but then he will point

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

out that now it is all quite different, that you really are going too far, that this time what you propose means *ruin*.

The rest of us must remember that all the elaborate paraphernalia of our economic and political worlds have only one true purpose, that is, to help people in general to enjoy a full and happy life. Nothing could appear more platitudinous. Yet it is forgotten all the time. If Man was not made for the Sabbath, then he certainly was not made for the balance of trade, the condition of industry, the State. These are merely bits of machinery. Nothing is truly real in this world but living creatures. So if you advocate a policy for England, you must ask yourself what will the English people in general get out of it? And I maintain that the policy of favouring England the money-lender, the receiver of interest from all parts of the world, at the expense of the other England, the producer, the manufacturer, trader, has been against the general happiness of the English people. I will not dwell upon the obvious danger, in these days, of depending upon a lot of people all over the world regularly paying the interest they once agreed to pay. Or upon the fact that this compels us to have a very expensive finger in everybody's pie. Other persons know more about these things than I do. But because I lay claim to a fair knowledge of the English people and their life, I will content myself with considering what has happened and is still happening in this island. For I



believe this policy, of favouring the money-lending England at the expense of the producing England, to be partly responsible for the present lethargic and uncreative mood of the country.

Wherever you move about in England, but more especially in the pleasanter country districts of the South, you will come across a surprising number of people who live on private incomes or pensions. Many of them are not elderly; and some, not, of course, of the pensioned class, are quite young. You meet these leisured folk everywhere. The quieter watering-places, the inland resorts, the cathedral cities and pleasanter market towns, and some of the more picturesque villages are filled with them. Some of them do very useful unpaid work, and nearly all of them are pleasant human beings. For years they have been the prey of our minor satirists, who often show a lack of insight and imagination in their handling of them. The liverish major from Poona; the spinster eager for gossip; the bored family in the shabby country house: all these have their own point of view and are as near the kingdom of heaven as most of us are likely to be. The last thing I want to do is to make a personal attack upon these people. Nevertheless, their presence here in such large numbers is a bad thing. We should be better off without them. And most of them would be better off if they were doing something beyond drawing their money. Many of them have real ability that is rusting away. They

have talents they cannot use. Again, because they do not work, many of them are cut off from whole sections of the community, for nine times out of ten a man's work immensely widens his acquaintance. Most of these people live far from the main stream of the national life. They do not see for themselves what is happening to the general community. They rely upon the Press, and usually the most biassed section of the Press. Largely through no fault of their own they tend to lead a bored, grumbling, uncreative sort of existence. And after a time they are chiefly motivated by their fear of losing their regular money, their only security, and this fear is not dulled but rather sharpened—or at least the resentment it breeds is heightened—by the lack of satisfaction in their own lives.

So they are naturally opposed to any experiment, to the nation taking any risk, to the faintest threat to their security. It follows then that, with some very honourable exceptions, they form a solid mass of short-sighted, timid, prejudiced, deeply conservative opinion. One wave of a little red flag and you can stampede the lot of them. They will elect any noodle so long as they think he is on the safe side. Sometimes they are men who have worked, often with great ardour and skill, in distant colonial possessions, where their life has completely unfitted them for joining in any great democratic experiment. They do not know or understand this country. Because they are no

longer regarded as important personages, have had to say good-bye to their retinues of native servants, their residences, their clubs, are compelled to pinch and scrape, and the England they have retired to does not seem the same place they remembered from uproarious holidays on leave, they turn sour and believe quite sincerely that liberals and socialists and mysterious armies of "these labour agitators" have nearly ruined the country. Others may have lived here all their lives, but only in one pleasant corner. They do not know what is happening in the dingy industrial towns far out of sight. They may grumble about high taxation and dwindling dividends, but as they keep to the South and to London they receive a quite false impression of bright prosperity. In this state of ignorance any catch-penny political cry will deceive them. And the irony of it is that most of these people would be much happier than they are to-day if they lost every penny but were given some decent work to do and found themselves really helping to save England, for which they have a genuine love. I suspect that many of them—but not, of course, the elderly members of this class, to whom all these remarks do not apply—secretly welcome any national crisis they can understand. The long boredom that began in 1919 is over. They can begin to live again.

At the other end of the scale is that terrible army of the real unemployed. The continued existence of this unhappy class, and of whole large areas where

there is hardly any work to do, is perhaps the darkest blot on modern English history. While these men and these areas exist, every Government we have has miserably failed. A Britain that still has a vast army of workless men, many of whom have almost forgotten what it is like to do a decent week's work and take home a man's wages, is a tragic failure of a Britain. Any talk of our comparative prosperity is an insult to our intelligence. Complacent references to other countries simply will not do. The shame and failure remain. The truth is that our dole system has been useless except for the men who fall out of work temporarily. It has not cured the real evil. To give a man just enough to exist on, miserably and unhealthily, with no apparent prospects of work and real wages, is simply to try and take the manhood out of him. It is not good economy, to say the least of it, for a nation to save money but to waste manhood. To turn fine, upstanding, happy artisans into grey-faced, shambling, under-nourished, prematurely old men is in the long run as expensive a business as it is a disgusting one. Even to this day there exists, especially among the other unemployed, the ones with incomes, a silly notion that somehow it is a man's own fault if he is unemployed. There seems to be no arguing with this idiocy. People who live far from the distressed industrial areas happen to know one or two shiftless fellows in their own neighbourhood who can never keep a job, and imagine that these fellows are typical

of the unemployed. But if the bank manager's wife woke up one morning to find that four banks out of every five had been closed, she would soon begin to understand what has happened to hundreds of thousands of her fellow-countrymen. We should have realised long ago that it is downright cruel to bring up men to feel that work and wages are bound up with their self-respect and then to let the work and wages be taken away from them. Except as a temporary measure, the dole system has nothing to recommend it to any humane person. In its effects upon human life it has proved far more expensive and disastrous than the most extravagant plan of relief work. Even Hitler and Goering can show us something better than we have got, and while we still have these grey ghosts of men in these dark, silent towns, we are in this one respect at least below the level of the dictators. I said long ago—and I still hold to it—that if a big chunk of London had been a distressed area, something genuinely creative would have been tried long before this. But the broken men and the ruined towns were comfortably out of sight; and the new industrial enterprises all established themselves round every new main road leading out of London, to swell a city already much too large, and to increase this country's terrible vulnerability to air attack. And because of that vulnerability, the Czechs had to lose their freedom. And so the unhappy tale runs on.

Is London still the financial capital of the world? I hope not. I distrust this money-lending England, represented by the City, and I should like to see it receive such a set-back that the other, the producing England, came to be given another chance. The City is much too near Westminster; they can hear each other talking. For the last twenty years we have been governed for the benefit of the City, and it does not follow that what sustains the City is the best sustenance for the nation. There are better ways of earning a living than drawing interest on loans. Production is healthier and more satisfying than usury. What this policy of favouring the money-lending Britain has created is chiefly these two sets of unemployed, with one large group of people bored and grumbling, and the other under-nourished and hopeless. And one set of unemployed has helped to prevent our making a plan for the salvation of the other set. Meanwhile, the foreigner tends to be envious of our unearned wealth and contemptuous of our grey poverty. We do not want to live in a country of such bitter extremes. It is not our idea of England at all. We do not want a land in which ruined industrial areas, where ghosts of good workmen go wandering about to pick up rubbish, alternate with money-lenders' bright gardens. The policy that has resulted in something like this has been tried long enough. It is time it was reversed, to produce a creative England in which the maximum and not the minimum of

people are doing a little useful work.

My sympathies are—and always have been—Left Wing. I was born and spent my boyhood in an industrial region, where if the working folk had not combined to demand better conditions, they would have been lucky to have had a little sugar for their tea. I knew elderly men and women who could remember the terrible old days when as little children they had to creep out in the dark of early morning, work through the day in the factories, and then go home in the dark of night. My father, a schoolmaster, fought for years to put an end to the “half-time” system, under which schoolchildren of twelve and thirteen would spend half the day at school and the other half in the factories, where they learnt a great deal that they would have been better for not knowing. Some of the gigantic mills, which provided their owners with titles and distant mansions and grouse moors and deer forests, used the men and women who worked all their lives in them as if they were little better than the bobbins and spindles whirling ceaselessly on the machines. I had grown up with strikes, and knew that men and women with starvation just round the corner never risked striking unless they were getting desperate. I had seen rough, half-educated men make more in a day out of a lucky gamble in wool than their brothers and cousins could make out of a lifetime of hard work. In my childhood I had visited grandparents and uncles and aunts

who still lived in the wretched little "back-to-back" houses in the long, dark streets behind the mills. I had played football and gone soldiering with warehouse lads and wool-combers' and dyers' labourers, miners and foundry men and fitters. The first regular weekly writing I ever did was for a little local Labour paper. I did not discover "the proletariat" in late night talks in some tutor's rooms at Oxford. I grew up with the proletarians in one of the grimmest industrial regions in the country, and indeed their blood is mine just as, I hope, their dreams are mine. My sympathies, I repeat, are Left Wing.

But that does not mean that I have said good-bye to any critical intelligence I might have had. I am a critical Left Winger, which means that I am not likely to be overwhelmingly popular with all the others, for it is my experience that most Left Wingers take criticism very badly. It is as if most of them feel that you ought to turn a sharp clear eye to the Right and a dull hazy eye to the Left. One bad trick that many of them have, to save themselves from testing the truth and force of adverse criticism, is to pretend that anybody who is not busy cheering the usual rhetoric must have been "got at by the boss class." This certainly saves trouble, but it does not make for intelligent progress. If you cannot stop to examine a reasonable objection, you will not be successful at running a great country, unless, of course, you adopt secret-police-and-concentration-camp methods. I re-



member, a few years ago, there was a crowded meeting at the Central Hall to protest against the Anti-Sedition Bill, and I happened to be one of the speakers. H. G. Wells spoke just before me, and he had just returned from Russia and, with that courageous honesty of his, which always sparkles a little with malice, he tried to indicate what he thought about some Soviet habits. But he was hardly given a chance. One section of the audience howled him down. They would not listen to any criticism of their Mecca. Yet we had all gathered there to defend freedom of speech. And there was a period when I seemed to be spending my time signing protests against the attempted dragooning of young communists who had spoken their minds, or alternatively defending, against the jeering attacks of other young communists, my sentimental bourgeois liberal notion that people should be allowed to speak their minds. There appeared to be two distinct ethical standards. If our party severely repressed all criticism, that was necessary and right, an example of a sound, courageous, realistic policy. If the other side did it, that was yet another terrible example of their grim determination to destroy our freedom. These are merely cynical old political tactics, and they will not do. You cannot really improve the world by manipulating it in the same bad old way. You can only improve it by bringing into it, from some other and greater world of feeling, imagination and will, more courage and honesty and

kindness. Fundamentally there is no other way. The spokesmen of the oppressed people, the representatives of a new social justice, have to be *better men* than the other politicians. This may make the journey longer and harder, but any desperate short cuts will prevent us from ever reaching the journey's end.

An unscrupulous determination to achieve power at any cost is not, however, a fault with which the official Labour Party could be charged. Indeed, it would seem to most people about the last charge that could be brought against this large, highly organised but curiously ineffectual party. My own objection to it is that I distrust its trade union basis. Not that I dislike trades unions in themselves, but I do not think they make a good foundation for a national political party. To begin with, the system is not conspicuously democratic. There is no more reason why we should be governed by railwaymen and transport workers, just because they belong to large and powerful unions, than that we should be governed by rich employers and landowners because they are paying the most taxes. It does not follow that because there are a great many railwaymen and transport workers they will have a real national outlook, not coloured by any prejudices arising from class or occupation. There is, however, a more fundamental objection. It is that a trade union background and training produce a certain type of mind, admirable within its limits, but not a deeply creative, really statesman-like mind. The

task of a trade union official is to see that his members are fairly dealt with by their employers and to secure for them the best possible hours, wages and conditions. He and his organisation act as a brake and a check on the capitalist system of the employer. If that system remains the engine, then we certainly need such brakes, but clearly what we need far more is another kind of engine, another system, which will be produced by ardently creative political minds. The thorough-going trade unionist, it seems to me, naturally assumes that somebody else will *start* something, and that then he will pop in and see that the wages and hours are all right. That limitation of outlook was clearly seen in Citrine's book on Soviet Russia, for there he did not seem to understand that the familiar wages-and-hours judgment was useless. The Russian experiment may or may not be succeeding; that is not the point; the fact is that it is an experiment, an attempt at a new system altogether, and its temporary working conditions have no more to do with Citrine's trade union rules and standards than a siege would have, or a dash to the North Pole, or a house on fire. If we in England believed that we could abolish poverty and unemployment and social injustice, and end by taking from all according to their ability and giving to all according to their need, what would it matter if during the next five years, with that shining goal in sight, we worked day and night like madmen for next to nothing and accepted

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

conditions that were a trade union official's nightmare? If we ever do build Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land, it will certainly not be done under trade union rules. And for this good reason, that the very existence of a trade union assumes that its members are an exploited class, compelled to sell their labour to persons who will make a profit out of it, without any real interest in the work they are doing and what is being created by it, trying to strike the best bargain and not genuinely co-operating. I cannot see how a man who lives in this atmosphere can have much initiative and think creatively on broad national lines.

Going a little further Left, we arrive at another weakness. It can be illustrated by a reminiscence. Two or three years ago I accepted an invitation to talk to a summer school organised by a section of this further Left. I told them in this talk that they ought to make more effort to convert the middle-classes, pointing out that the highly trained technicians, so necessary now in industry, were all members of these middle-classes. With the enthusiastic approval of our audience, the leader of the party replied that they cared nothing for the middle-classes, that one class-conscious navvy was worth all the middle-classes put together, and so forth. Everybody cheered, but I felt rather melancholy, for I had hoped that we had met there not to see who could catch the easiest and biggest round of applause, but to try and talk a little

sense. And I could not understand how a country could be run on silly rhetoric of this kind. These people, so far as I knew, were not aiming at bloody revolution, the destruction of the contemporary standard of living, a return to some early medieval style of life, and yet they could set aside, as being useless to them, the very people who are of most use in a modern State, the technical experts. Why not have these people with you from the start? Why deliberately arrange things in advance so that the ugliest coercion may be found necessary. There is, of course, a good deal of proletarian sentimentalism about all this. It confuses admiration with pity. Because certain classes are the victims of social injustice, it assumes that all members of those classes shine with a noble virtue. Just as the eighteenth-century sentimental philosophers, who had never travelled far, believed in the Noble Savage. It is a reverse snobbery. Some young men are bringing it into their novels and plays now. But merely banishing champagne and caviare, polo and yachting, in favour of fish and chips, beer and football pools, is not progress. Moreover, the refusal to make converts outside the working classes is very dangerous. The assumption that any man in a position of authority, with some spare cash in his pocket, is the Enemy, who can never be persuaded to throw in his lot with the workers and who may have to be summarily dealt with later, is very mischievous. That is how Fascists are made.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Further Left still are the Marxists, who are not numerous in England, although this settle-everything creed attracts a good many impatient young intellectuals. Clearly you can turn Marxist for one of two reasons: because you believe it to be all true; or because although it may not be all true, it is the most useful creed for anybody who wishes to replace capitalism by collectivism. It leaves me dissatisfied and unattracted on both of these grounds. I do not believe it to be all true, nor do I understand how, if you accept it, you can have any criterion of truth. I believe it to be based on a false materialism. I am not convinced by its dialectical process. It seems, so far as I can understand it, inconsistent and self-contradictory. I have no objection to its economics, am not afraid of its political and economic consequences, but mistrust it as a substitute for philosophy and religion. It represents another and extremely narrow, bigoted fundamentalism. Its success might result in the imprisonment of the human spirit. But most of the people I know who call themselves Marxist behave as if Marxism were useful rather than strictly true. (Thus they believe in certain spiritual qualities and values that can have no genuine existence in the world of Marx's *theory*, not in his practice.) But I cannot see its utility now. Here in Western Europe we could do better, as collectivists, without it. And especially here in England, where its nonsense is not our nonsense. I have noticed about many of our extreme Left Wingers

a Central European rather than an English air and atmosphere. They do not seem at home on our soil. I do not see their kind ever leading the English people, most of whom have not enough intellect to follow the Marxist logic, but have too subtle an intuitive sense of values to accept its grosser conclusions. The Marxist is too clever but not good enough for them.

The earlier English Socialism, from Owen to Morris, was the product of middle-class compassion and idealism rather than of proletarian resentment. The men and women who demanded this social revolution did not do so because they were trying to compensate themselves for some deep-seated feeling of inferiority. They were not failures hoping to be successes under a changed social system. They were not moved by vindictiveness disguised as the reforming and crusading spirit. There is much to be said in favour of that earlier Socialism, and fortunately I see signs, especially in the Leftward movement of so many of the educated middle-classes, of a return to it. We are told by the tough revolutionists that this middle-class Socialism is merely so much pretty sentimentality that gets nothing done. But in my opinion it did a good deal in its time, and now, in an age that no longer believes in automatic progress and is beginning to despair, it could do infinitely more. And it can avoid the mistakes of that school of Left Wing thought which takes the view that the privileged

classes cannot be gradually ousted out of power and that they will fight desperately, shedding much blood, before they will climb down from their seats. This seems to me both untrue and very dangerous.

It is dangerous because although it is not true now, when it is still possible, here in England, to transfer power so gradually that no excuse is given for a real battle-cry and a stand at any cost, it can be turned into truth by constant and warning repetition. (Consider what has happened with the income and surtaxes. If years ago when taxation was low a government had suddenly proposed to take from a third to a half of large incomes, that government would certainly have been destroyed by the rich, who would have cried out that they were not going to be taxed out of existence. Yet that is what they pay now, and not a drop of blood has been shed. In the same way, they have been gradually compelled to relinquish much of their former political and economic power, and a really strong Labour Government, which is something we have not even had a glimpse of yet, could certainly speed up the process quite successfully without a shot being fired.) And if it were true, if we should be threatened with civil war or violent revolution, then no matter what end was in view, this would be, in my opinion, both horrible and futile. The result would be more disastrous in England than in some other countries, where the classes have hated each other for generations, because there is very little



of such hate here, and suddenly to introduce it seems to me a step back and not a step forward. Violent revolution is often compared to a surgical operation. Let there be a short period of fear, pain, bloodshed, cruelty, so that the health of the social body may be improved. This is, I think, a false analogy and a mistaken notion. To bring hate, terror, cruelty, into a community that has known little of them would be to retard and not to advance the progress of civilisation. The terrible emotions created and let loose would prevent the imagined end from being achieved. Instead of moving up a spiral you would merely swing a vast pendulum. You cannot create good by adding to the world's evil.

So far then, it might be imagined that although I am worried about the present condition of England, and especially worried about the quality of contemporary English life, I have an enthusiasm about the English middle-classes. Most of my adverse criticism has gone to the right or left of them. I have said that Labour cannot get along without them. I am prepared to welcome a *bourgeois* middle-class democracy. Does this mean that I think there is nothing wrong with this great mass of our people who are neither rich nor poor, neither powerful nor quite helpless? It does not. They have a great many serious faults and weaknesses, these middle people of ours. There is not much in our national life at present we can point to with pride; we seem to waver between fear and

apathy; no great common cause animates and then sustains us; we are more inheritors than creators, and even as inheritors we have partly failed, for we have allowed the loveliest countryside in the world to be almost ruined; we are content with a wretched quality of life for most of our people, moving between antiquated factories and dingy streets of dreary little houses, living in country places that no longer have any charm and in towns without a true urban civilisation; we seem to be ready to sacrifice almost everything for a little temporary comfort, and even then we do not much enjoy it; we behave rather like a people in decline. And for much of this I think we must blame these very middle-classes. It is from them that the noble impulse to make this a better country should have come. They are not conditioned from birth by a strong caste feeling and outlook, as are their social superiors, whose social superiority these middle-class folk are much too ready to acknowledge and admire. They are not, as a whole, fighting desperately to maintain a decent standard of living, engaged in a permanent battle with grim circumstance, as the working people are. Most of them have been reasonably well educated. Because they include in their ranks nearly all the people most necessary to a modern industrial community—the scientists and technicians and professional men—therefore they have the power. Generally they are in a position to influence their fellow-voters. No other classes can compare with them

as potential political forces. In five years they could re-make Britain.

They have not done it already—and at the moment show precious few signs of doing it—simply because they have no strong desire to do it. No lasting vision of a nobler England haunts them. The reason for this is that such is their present style of life that no vision of any kind haunts them. (There are thousands of exceptions, of course, but we are dealing now with the middle section of a whole population.) Most of them are living too near the surface of things. They are leading too trivial and material an existence. They give themselves up to what I will call a car-and-wireless life. There is nothing wrong with cars and wireless sets, and I am glad not to be without either of them myself. But a life that hardly moves away from a schoolboy fussing with such things obviously lacks fullness and depth. Three-quarters of the rich channels of communication in the mind are closed up. The whole universe has shrivelled. A large proportion of the young people of these classes marry and settle into a little bungalow, join the local tennis club, acquire a wireless set and a car, and then might be simply a pair of cave dwellers for all the relation they have to the largest life of the community, or to the noble and enduring life of art, philosophy and religion. They may be quite pleasant young people, but at times they remind us uncomfortably of robots. And the trouble about this thin and scratchy sort of

existence is that not only do the people themselves get very little out of it, but there is little or nothing coming out of it for the community at large. Strong and generous impulses, moving us to desire and work for the common good, arise in natures that are themselves strong and generous. There is a vicious circle here. Because the quality of your own life falls below a certain level, you will soon be unwilling or unable to work towards the raising of the general quality of life. "We receive but what we give," said Coleridge, of ourselves and Nature. But so far as ourselves and our community are concerned, unless we happen to be very exceptional persons we give but what we receive.

You see a new kind of urban life now in the natty suburbs of the provincial cities and near all the main roads leading out of London. In theory and on paper it looks a pretty good life. It is very much of our time, bang up to date, with its neat labour-saving contrivances, and a lot of ingenious machines working for it. The life, like most of the contrivances and machines, was imported from the United States. It ought to be much more fun, far more rewarding in every way, than the sort of existence my parents led just off Toller Lane, Bradford, in the early years of this century. It ought, but I do not think it is. Only in theory is it a great improvement on the older kinds of bourgeois life. There is less daily worry and work for the housewives, who, in consequence, look prettier

after a few years of marriage than they used to when I was a boy. But on the other hand, these modern suburban young wives have to keep paying visits to the doctor, not because they are really sick in body, but because they are a trifle sick in mind. The trouble is that they feel depressed, dreary, and terribly lonely. Now people like my parents lived in a real society, were members of a community, whereas a great many of these young flat-and-bungalow couples do not live in a society and are not members of a community. They are young people eating and sleeping and trying to enjoy themselves in a certain place, with no interest in or feeling of responsibility for that place. They are nearly as far removed from the main stream of civic life as those melancholy souls who exist perpetually in hotels. There is something thin, brittle, mechanical about their life. It lacks richness, human variety, sap and juice, just because it has no real social background. Higher wages, shorter hours, more labour-saving devices, bigger garden suburbs, though excellent things in themselves, will not greatly improve this way of living. What they cannot restore to it is the social background, the civic feeling, the deep sense of being a member of a community. The people do not really *belong* to the place they are in, but are camping in it. They are nomads without a tribe.

Then this new urban life we are developing, after the American pattern, differs from the old one I knew in the significant fact that it is far more dependent on

money. My parents spent about fourpence on a tram and then went walking, probably every fine Saturday. These young people have to run a car, and that costs money. To go to the films, to dine in restaurants, to go out and dance, these pleasures all cost money, whereas it is very cheap to talk to your friends and give them a bite of supper at home, to sing in a choir, to attend political meetings, to search for wild flowers or look at birds. Although I am in favour of money being briskly circulated and believe that once we are free of a faulty and cramping financial system we shall have more to spend, I think it is dangerous to be too dependent on money. Many of the most satisfying things in life cost little or nothing. And our new way of living tempts us to overlook this important fact. Again, that old life was far more active than this new one. People did things themselves instead of allowing others to do everything for them. There is nothing essentially wrong with our new popular amusements, such as films and the radio, both of which have done much to brighten people's lives. But they should be enjoyed actively and not passively, attended to eagerly and critically and not used as a kind of mild dope. Chesterton once observed shrewdly that there was a great difference between an eager man who wanted to read a book and a tired man who wanted a book to read. It is the difference between active and passive amusements. Now we have too many tired persons who merely want a book to read, a film to stare at, a

wireless programme to listen to, and to be smothered in a stuffy comfort while they are doing it. There is too much of this: "You can do it from your own arm-chair." This is all right for the elderly, but younger people should get out of their arm-chairs and do something more than turn on a switch. I was brought up among people who could amuse themselves, could play instruments and sing and devise games and argue half the night, and I distrust this passive drowsy crowd we are creating who can do nothing for themselves and will not have anything unless it is handed to them almost on a plate while they bury themselves in their arm-chairs or their velvet theatre seats. We used to storm gallery doors and sit jammed on wooden benches, with our heads only a few feet below the roof or perhaps less than that from the side-walls with their caged gas-jets, to see the plays of my boyhood; but now these young suburban folk will tell you that they do not want to come near your theatre unless you can guarantee them a velvet-covered seat booked over the telephone for two or three shillings. I do not want theatres or any other places to be uncomfortable; I am no Spartan myself; but I dislike this insistence upon comfort and convenience before everything else. We do not want a whole population behaving as if they were malingering, rich, spoilt old women.

There is another and most important difference. People like my parents—to use their own matchless phrase—attended places of worship. Now that I see

that old phrase with a fresh eye, I also see how astonishing it is. Places of worship. How much we have lost, we of the younger generations, by having no places of worship! Perhaps this new world must remain desolate at heart until it achieves new places of worship. Then the spirit of Man will come home again to the universe. But apart from all questions of belief, what is certain is that the absence of church or chapel from these young people's lives has vastly increased their sense of detachment and their feeling of loneliness. When I was a boy the chapel played a very important part indeed in the communal life. It was the great focal point, the centre, the meeting-place. Something was always happening there. If the chapel had been taken away there would have been an enormous gap, and I fancy not all that gap has been filled. It is possible that the moderns in their labour-saving flats or natty bungalows will not live richly and deeply again, will continue to feel that there is something sterile and faintly desolating in their lives, until some central institution like the old chapel, with the same focusing of interests and the same sense of community, is created once more. And if this new institution can be dedicated to men's profoundest beliefs and emotions, to their conviction that they need not be lost in the universe, then so much the better.

Too many people, then, in these middle-classes of ours are living a thin, sterile, mechanical sort of exist-



ence, cut off from any deep sense of community, rather lonely at heart, and not sustained by any vision of the good life. Because they are poor in spirit themselves they do not insist upon a nobler quality of national life. That is why any social creed that denies art, philosophy, religion, telling its adherents that such things are mere vanities and toys, to be put away altogether or kept for some future age of leisure, is a creed that is busy severing its own roots and destroying its own nourishment. All good things must move forward together. Therefore I am a bitter opponent of the view that politics can be entirely separated from any notions of a general culture, that we can act politically and economically without reference to any philosophy of life. I mistrust the artist who has not a glimmer of a political idea. But even more do I mistrust the politician who is indifferent to the full life of the mind and the spirit, who shrugs his shoulders at any mention of literature, painting, music, the drama, and philosophy. He is the man that has no music in himself and "is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils; the motions of his spirit are dull as night, and his affections dark as Erebus." And we have too many of them here, dwarfs chattering and intriguing. With this great passive and visionless public standing by, or buried deep in their famous arm-chairs by the fireside, these little men go through their routine of antics; and the whole dreary spectacle suggests a great people in decline, some windless sodden late autumn

day in the history of a noble race. There is still virtue in us. A clever foreigner, who knows us well, remarked to me not long ago: "You know, the English are a *good* people. When you come to know them, you see there is something naturally, instinctively religious about them." He was saying what those two philosophers, Santayana and MacMurray, had already said about us. At heart the English are good people. They have even now an immense store of political and civic virtue, of genuine good-will. Many a shabby act has been performed in their name, but rarely, rarely with their knowledge and consent. When they think, which is so often what they hate to do, they think broadly and generously, warmed by some obscure deep feeling of fellowship. The world will be a better place when the English are wide awake again, richly creative in all the arts of life, and not merely mumbling and grumbling in their sleep.

## XIV

ON THE LITTLE TABLE NEAR MY DESK THERE ARE half a dozen thick buff folders, containing cuttings of all the newspaper articles I have written during these last two years. There are dozens of these articles. I had forgotten how much journalism I had done. The subjects, I remember, were mostly suggested by the editors themselves: *Men and Women*, *Education*, *The New Loneliness*, *Happiness*, *What I Believe*, *This World of Fear*, *The Yin and the Yang*, *The Mystery of Time*; and so on and so forth. Grave and great subjects, most of them, to be tackled in fifteen hundred hasty words. I can almost hear the usual sneer. The best-selling novelist pretending to know about everything—yah! It does not matter, I suppose, that I did this kind of journalism long before I was a novelist at all, and may still be doing it long after I have ceased to “best-sell.” (Is it too late to make yet another protest against the habit of turning this trade term, for that is all it is, into an offensive weapon of criticism?) Why have I written these articles? For money? Partly. To keep in touch with a large public? Quite possibly. There is, however, a third reason, which is that if I have the time and the subject is attractive, I like to write an article of

this type because it helps me to put my scattered thoughts and reflections and guesses at the nature of things into some sort of order. I do not know how much the readers, having a go at my stuff after swallowing the Hollywood Revelations and before settling down to the Problems of a Football Manager, have learned from these articles, but I know that I have learned a good deal. To write fifteen hundred easily-understood words, in a crisp, dogmatic style, about the relations between men and women, the importance of education, the growing fear in the world, the nature of happiness, the problem of Time, or your fundamental beliefs, is to be compelled to take stock of such thought as you possess, hastily to reduce your mind to some kind of order, and to put yourself to a rather searching test. I am, of course, assuming that you are trying to be sincere and are not turning out hokum at so much a paragraph. Making allowance for the large slap-dash method, as necessary to a journalist as it is to a poster artist, you must please grant me sincerity. I am not as certain of anything as I appear to be in a newspaper article, or for that matter in a book, but that does not mean I am faking, but only that the medium of communication demands a crisp, dogmatic style. On the other hand, the test of brief, clear expression to which I put myself has helped me to arrive at certain conclusions.

It is as if a conjurer should take all these newspaper cuttings, twist them into a hollow cone, and out

of that cone bring a real live rabbit. For if I put these conclusions of mine together I have something that looks like the beginning of a philosophy. I will not put it higher than that. And I do not mean one of those professional philosophies that are published by the University Presses at two guineas the two volumes. I mean a ramshackle amateur job of a philosophy, a patchwork of beliefs, guesses, prejudices, entirely beneath the notice of a trained metaphysician. But with life in it. For the last twenty years I have read a good deal of philosophy in a hazy, lazy, literary man's fashion. Ever since I first listened to McTaggart at Cambridge I have been either fascinated or amused by metaphysics. McTaggart, an eccentric but lovable being, had a large round face, with spectacles on the tip of his nose, and he tilted his face to one side as he lectured, stared towards the ceiling, and would prove something about pink elephants in a high chuckling voice. He looked like an enormous, fantastic child who had just arrived from the moon. Listening to him was like watching a first-class conjurer. There was, you felt, a catch in it somewhere, but you were too spellbound to bother finding out where the catch was. Ever since there has been to me about all metaphysics a suggestion of McTaggart's peculiar atmosphere of childlike diablerie. But the test I bring to philosophers, in my own bungling fashion, is illogical, irrational and very personal. Is there, I ask myself as I read, any stir of life in all this? If I do

not feel there is, if it all seems so much dead-wood, out he goes. Now there was in McTaggart's towering pagodas of metaphysical idealism somewhere this stir of life. I cannot read more than a page or two of Whitehead without a good halt for breath and a rest; it is like trying to eat a mixture of hay and tin-tacks; and yet I know that in Whitehead there is a genuine stir of life. John MacMurray is at the other end of the scale of expression from Whitehead, for he is exquisitely lucid, like a good pianist playing a Bach fugue; but he has for me the same stir of life. Dunne is not a professional philosopher, and the logicians have fired broadsides at him and riddled him for his verbal inconsistencies; but, nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that whereas nearly all of them are dead, doing their damage like the horrible wooden figures in *Phantastes*, he is alive and brings something to life in me. It is all summed up in the vital difference between a testament and a text-book.

Text-book thinkers resemble the age, which indeed they have helped to shape and colour, in being intellectually conceited. It is Science that has made us so conceited. Great scientists are nearly always genuine wise men, sages, but after all there are not many of them, whereas there are multitudes of the triumphant little men. It is these little men who produce the "nothing but" accounts of this life, robbing it of all mystery and wonder. Life, they tell us, is "nothing but" something or other; and if I know nothing else,

I know in my very bones that these fellows are wrong. I would rather believe the wildest nonsense ever imported with the films and tinned fruit from California than march round their tiny circle with these "nothing but" men. I would rather believe that I am an ex-Babylonian queen who has been turned into a Yorkshire author by a Great White Master in Tibet. I would rather believe that I am being guided by the spirit of my late great-uncle Alfred through a dead Red Indian who speaks in the voice of a stout woman in a Brixton basement. Anything, anything rather than this cheap, cocksure intellectuality, which despises every age but this because we know, and they didn't know, how to fly the Atlantic or to use X-rays. For our very progress has only thrown into relief our gigantic silliness. You have only to read a newspaper or take a short walk to discover that we are among the silliest people who ever lived. We are also the great prostitutes of all time, sending all nine muses on the streets. We have sharpened the intellect to a fine edge, but too often so that it shall slash away in the service of trivial minds and empty hearts. And what is the use of telling us that scientific education will put us right when in Germany, where there was more scientific education than anywhere else, a barbaric idiocy is trampling down any attempt at the good life?

My little patchwork philosophy begins by assuming that we know very little about life, and that the

scientist, who is compelled to think of it as a series of mechanical operations, does not know much more than the ordinary man, who probably sees it as a mere muddle of accidents. The truth about its working, when it arrives, will not be simple. It will be far removed from that "nothing but" nonsense. The notion that we see the whole real world is laughable. Our senses respond to a few limited wave-lengths and out of them we have to construct the universe. It is as if you had a wireless set that gave you nothing but the Northern Ireland Regional programme, and yet you imagined you were an authority on world radio. But if you enlarge the set you will discover more programmes. It is the same with us. I suspect that people in other ages were able to tune in to programmes that are now outside our range, although we in our turn have vastly improved our own particular set, which gives us first-class reception of the Conquest-of-Nature-by-Science programme. You do not advance in real knowledge and wisdom by analysing the one programme you get down to its last note—though this activity is not to be despised—but by enlarging the receiving apparatus and finding more and better programmes. In other words, the main line of progress runs through the consciousness itself. We have been trying for centuries to discover the clue to the mystery somewhere outside ourselves. We must now, if only for a change, reverse this process and try to find the clue inside ourselves.



When we do that and are nearing the discovery of new truth, we shall inevitably be disconcerted because this new truth will appear paradoxical, unreasonable, illogical. We shall be made to look foolish with ease, but that does not mean we shall not be right in the end. The *either-or* method, which has left us with so many insoluble problems, will have to be dropped. If we are to go forward into a higher, less abstract, richer, more fundamental reality, the *either-or* simply will not work. Either men are mortal or immortal, eh? No. Either you must accept determinism or free-will. No, we mustn't. Either the future exists or it doesn't exist. No, it both exists and doesn't exist. Either personality is real or an illusion. No, it is both or, if you will, neither. And so on. All of which means, of course, not that we have widened our outlook only to discover we are in a colossal madhouse, but that these alternatives are stated in terms that no longer apply, that the problems have been insoluble—as Coleridge saw long ago—because they are not set out properly. And I prophesy—though it is hardly prophecy when there are so many signs to be observed already—that very soon the air will be loud with arguments between men who cannot agree because they are talking about quite different worlds, as if one set saw only black-and-white and the others saw everything in colour.

Not unconnected with this is the recognition, which has always been present in wise minds, that life must

swing, carefully balanced, between two opposite poles. It is the negative-positive principle. There must be day and night, darkness and light, winter and summer, waking and sleep, youth and age, men and women, rest and activity, work and play, the Yin and the Yang. Nothing could seem more obvious, but it is in practice and not in theory that the principle goes unrecognised and the mischief is done. Any view of life that looks out from one pole and condemns the other must be a narrow and mistaken view. Thus there have been societies in which age was everything and youth nothing. Lately it has been suggested that youth should be everything and age nothing. We have all heard people exalt one sex at the expense of the other. There have been times when humanity was thought to exist to work and never to play. On the other hand, there have nearly always been some sections of society that existed only to play. All communities should preserve a balance between masculine and feminine interests, but very few of them do. Everywhere, in fact, you will see a great deal of Yin to a very little Yang, or far too much Yang for the Yin—*Oh, monstrous!—but one half-pennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack!*

In this principle of balance the opposite poles are equal and necessary, and there can be no question of any difference of value. Now we come to the companion but reverse principle, which I always like to associate with the profound New Testament remark

that the Sabbath is made for Man and not Man for the Sabbath. This has an enormously wide application, but too often it is clean forgotten, and much of our modern insanity derives from a temporary blindness to it. We are always being jockeyed into believing that some mere piece of machinery like the State or the industrial or financial system comes first and human beings come second. We see the dark abysses of this madness all round us now. It is our peculiar danger just because our age has concentrated so much on what appears to lie outside men's minds and so little on the actual quality of life. Organisation, which is only a sensible, smooth way of getting something done, becomes a mysterious deity demanding human sacrifice. The machine is more important than the men who work it. The State, that gigantic machine, is considered to be of more consequence than all the people it governs, because it apparently belongs to some higher order of being. These absurd values are possible in our time because while our mechanisms seem to us superb we have tended to form a lower and lower opinion of our common human nature. First the soul went, then most of the rational mind, until what was left was without dignity and nobility. Nearly all the great movements of this age have at their starting-point a contempt for the individual human being. Here, I believe, the American industrialist, with his mass production and his cynical publicity campaigns, the Russian Communist, with

his ruthless planning, and the Nazi or Fascist, with his impudent or deliberately base propaganda, could join hands. What is Man that anything should be made for him? The poor devil is lucky even to have the opportunity of serving such wonderful organisations, institutions, mechanisms. There were people who believed that nothing except the Kingdom of Heaven must be placed above what is necessary for the good life of human beings, and that this good life and the Kingdom of Heaven cannot compete because they are really the same thing. But what is the use of that sort of talk if you do not believe in the Kingdom of Heaven and do not think the good life possible? That is how the secret argument runs. And we shall do well to remember that now the Sabbath, for which they think Man has been made, will always turn out to be some kind of machine, whether it is manufacturing motor-cars or collecting taxes and mobilising armies.

A third principle I would put beside these two is that the end does not justify the means. You cannot make the world better by bringing into it more evil. If you wish to improve the lot of your fellow-citizens you will not do it by exterminating whole classes of people who are not in sympathy with your aims. You will not do it, because the extra load of cruelty, fear and suffering you have given the world will defeat your object. You cannot wade through blood into the earthly paradise, nor machine-gun people into another Golden Age. Hate produces hate, violence

asks for violence, cruelty begets cruelty. There is no road to human happiness that way. As with nations, who have always paid in full for their misdeeds, so that history seems a record of Karma, so it is with individuals. The man who lies and cheats his way will be caught and trapped in the end in a vicious circle. For what seemed good when he set out to obtain it at any cost will no longer seem good. His success will taste bitter. On the way to it he will have destroyed his capacity for enjoying it. "Macbeth hath murdered sleep." There are two reasons, I think, why good ends cannot be achieved by bad means. The first is that in reality the means and the end cannot be separated as they can in our statement of them. The second reason is that the world we see is a kind of reflection of a more enduring invisible world of feeling, imagination and will, and that nine-tenths of our being has its existence in this invisible world, which decides the essential quality of our experience. One week-end, we will say, we stab and shoot all the members of the party who do not agree with us and who might make trouble. An unpleasant business while it lasted, but it did not last long; we have a good excuse ready; they were all shockingly immoral persons, better out of the way; the excuse is accepted; we have the party to ourselves and all is well. Within a week or two we do not hesitate to congratulate each other on this neat, bold stroke. It appears to have left no traces on the visible world. But vast chains of

consequences are there in the invisible world, where perhaps they are still screaming and we are still stabbing; and we and everybody else have all the great roots of our being deep in that world, and we begin to have terrible dreams, and suspicion and fear and hate come bubbling from those depths, and already the feeling, imagination and will of whole masses of people are being shaped and coloured, until at last the pattern of events in this visible world will be suddenly changed, and things never foreseen that fateful week-end will come to pass. I think the ancient prophets, crying "Woel" because they said it was God's will that they should proclaim disaster to the people, could look a little way into this other world.

It seems to be a rule in that world that we must not wish too hard and make too many vehement demands. It will reward a steady purpose, but it plays ironical tricks on those who passionately insist upon having their way. If you keep your finger on the bell and shout that you want to enter, the door will not be opened. You have not to care too much. Perhaps this is really what the ancients meant when they decided that God was jealous. Even we who cannot believe in a God who could be jealous must recognise the mysterious and rather cruel working of this cause and effect. I have not myself a stormy, passionate, urgently demanding nature, but I do not dislike those who have it, and indeed prefer them to the very placid and the meek, often finding a bland benevolence

downright irritating; but I have to confess that the laws of the invisible world that really governs this one always seem to operate against such natures, disappointing them of their coveted rewards, snatching away the prizes at the last moment, shaping everything round them with a malicious irony, often hounding them through bitter comedy into tragedy. So do not ask too much and too often, do not insist upon all you wish or nothing, do not swear passionately that you will be this or do that; take it easy inside; for it is inside that the mischief or the miracles are first worked.

Another principle, which if it is ignored can create great misery, is that we owe a double duty. Moralists are fond of pointing out to us our duty to others, but forget that we also owe a duty to ourselves, and that often we cannot do our duty to others if we have not first done it to ourselves. (I use the familiar language, but I suspect we have no real selves. See later.) That is why loose talk about selfishness can be very dangerous. We have to realise our own fundamental natures. Jesus is the great symbolic figure of self-sacrifice. Nearly all the conventional moralists, if they had known him during his last years, would not have hesitated to denounce him as a tremendous egoist, steeped in selfishness. He took leave of his occupation, his home, relatives, friends, and encouraged other men to take leave of theirs. He must be held responsible for a wholesale neglect of duty. Yet how

could he have realised his own nature, and helped millions of others to realise theirs, if he had followed any other course of conduct? It may be argued that there should be here a synthesis of these antithetical sets of duties, that beyond our duty to others and our duty to ourselves is our duty to God, which if it can be plainly seen (and usually it can't) will enable us at once to decide what we owe to ourselves and what we owe to others. But it is clear that unless many men had not led lives that made them seem to countless good folk sheer monsters of selfishness, the world would have lost much of value. Nearly all artists, who do not seem to themselves to be relentlessly pursuing their own ends but rather obeying mysterious commands that come from outside their own ego, have had to fight this battle. On the other hand, there are people who seem at first sight to be patterns of self-forgetfulness, who have been forever sacrificing themselves, yet seem to us on closer acquaintance to be narrow, desiccated, bitter. "Abstinence sows sand all over the ruddy limbs and flaming hair." What has often warped such persons is that they have neglected to perform their duty to themselves. They have checked their own growth. They have never flowered. Frequently they profess creeds that insist upon a tremendous amount of worry and self-nagging about small ethical points. This fuss about the minor details of conduct soon makes for egoism. Nobody ever saved his soul by perpetually worrying about it.



Why do so many good Christians improve upon Christ? And what is the exact meaning of that remark about saving the soul by losing it? I used to think that it meant that you must lose yourself in matters outside yourself, attach yourself to what is bigger than you are, not making your own existence the centre of the universe. This is certainly the way to be happy: to be so lost that you do not even ask yourself if you are happy and are not conscious of yourself in the middle of the picture. For there is no nourishment to be drawn out of sucking your thumb. But now I am coming to believe that saving the soul by losing it means much more than that. Something more profound than mere self-forgetfulness is hinted at, more than a busy altruism, more than enthusiasm for some cause, more even than a wide and deep charity. I suspect that you save your soul by losing it as a trickle of water loses itself in a river. On the other hand, you really lose it by hanging on and saving it—from death, we think, but really from life. This suspicion, which cannot yet be called a belief, came to me after I had a certain dream.

## XV

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THEY NEVER DREAM, and those who rarely remember what they have dreamt, and then there are those who are the dreamers. I am one of the dreamers. My dreaming self is just as important as my waking self. I have had dreams that haunted me for days and days and made my ordinary life seem a dreary routine of washing and eating and working. Many a morning I have wakened dizzy with mysterious good news, babbling of "Africa and golden joys." I dream so much, so quickly after closing my eyes, that I am ready to accept the strange theory that we never stop dreaming, that we are at it all day long, and simply do not notice our dreams because our attention is sharply focused on the outside world. If almost at any time I sprawl in a deep chair, completely relaxed, I am soon weaving in and out of dreamland: there is a book in my hands, I stare hard at it, now it is gone, for it was a book out of some dream library and I am back in my own; but not for long am I back, for now the walls are different, it is some other room, in a dream-house, and I see faces and hear voices, try to pay more attention and find myself once more in my own room. I

have spent hours in this fashion, flickering between two worlds, in which at these times there seems no difference of quality, one being as solid and vivid as the other. There is never anything familiar to me in these scattered fragments of dream life. If they owe anything to memory then they are most subtly disguised. It is more as if I picked up tiny pieces of somebody else's life, as if because I had let my own attention go then I must share some other man's. I am still referring to these afternoon snatches of dream, not to the full-dress affairs of the night. Then, in that strange sunlight and moonlight that is at the other side of darkness, I live a second life.

The conventional notion of a dream is some phantasmagoria of the day's anxieties to which are added some special effects, terrible or obscene. Thus the typical dream for me, an author, would be some business about finishing a book or producing a play, with the publisher or leading actor turning into my Uncle George, rounded off by some comic or fearful business about my not being able to find my trousers or being chased by a tiger. That is the kind of dream that novelists nearly always give their characters: "That night," they tell us, "Frank dreamed he was sitting in the office and Aunt Agatha, wearing chain armour, came clanking in—" and so on. But, unless my memory is very treacherous, I have had very few dreams of this kind. My dreams do not appear to have been composed in this fashion, making a sort of

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

wild salad out of recent events and worries. I have had innumerable fantastic dreams, of course, but nothing in these dreams announces that I am by profession an author, that I am the father of a fine growing family, have a house in Highgate Village and another here in the Isle of Wight, that I was once at Cambridge, before that in the army, and before that a lad in Yorkshire. The autobiographical element is almost entirely absent. Most of them might be anybody's dreams, or bits of somebody else's life, but, of course, in these instances a life far more fantastic than the ordinary one we know. Only a few nights ago I was so tickled by what I saw and heard in a dream that I awoke and lay chuckling in the dark. I dreamt I was in some very large concert hall and there was not only an orchestra on the platform but several more, smaller and of varying kinds, a dance band, a military band, and so forth on little platforms here and there. (It was like an exaggerated version of a full-scale performance of Berlioz's *Requiem*, which I heard more than five-and-twenty years ago.) The concert opened with the national anthem. A fussy conductor appeared in the body of the hall and all the other conductors had to take their time from him, so that they directed their own orchestras half-turned away from them. The result was—for they were all cautious men—that *God Save the King* came out in a dreadfully halting and dragging pace, and this made me laugh so much that I laughed myself clean out of the concert

hall back into my bed, where I continued laughing.

During the Nineteen-Twenties, when I used to write a weekly essay, I devoted no less than three of them simply to describing, without any extra invention, dreams I had had. I have just been looking at one of them, called *The Strange Outfitter*, and included in a book of mine, *Apes and Angels*, that I had not even glanced at for more than ten years. Indeed, I had forgotten both the dream and the essay I wrote about it. But in this dream I visited an outfitter's shop, and there tried on a cap, and when I looked at myself wearing this cap I found to my delight that I was dazzlingly fair and handsome, in the very sharpest contrast to my usual self. When I took off the cap, I looked myself again. Then there was some comic business about smoking, after which the shop turned into a sitting-room, and I discovered that the outfitter was now sitting with a tall woman, and that both of them were wearing large masks. "The most surprising and frightening thing about them," I wrote of these masks, "was that they had movable mouths." And I described how these two chattered and gibbered away at each other, and how I saw then, in the street outside, a whole crowd of people, dancing and singing, and all wearing masks. This makes strange reading now, twelve years afterwards, for in our production of *Johnson Over Jordan*, not only did all the crowd in the Second Act wear masks but these masks were as novel as they were hideous (and expensive) because

they had been specially designed to have *movable mouths*. Mere coincidence? Possibly, possibly. It may also have been coincidence that when I was a school-boy I dreamt that an uncle whom I rarely saw suddenly appeared in a doorway and glared at me angrily. I woke up, shivering with fright, and the dream impressed itself upon my memory. Then, years afterwards, during the War I was home on leave and, waiting for the second house of a neighbouring music-hall to open, I was having a drink in a rather crowded bar. I felt somebody staring at me and looking down the bar saw this same uncle, glaring just as he had done in that old dream. We had not met for years, and he was not sure that this fellow in uniform was his nephew, but he came across to reproach me angrily about something that was actually no fault of mine. But his manner—for he had had a few drinks and was inclined to lose his head—secretly frightened me. Was it a coincidence that I had dreamt years before of this unexpected glaring look? Possibly, possibly. But I have had so many of the coincidences, for I will take a look at a landscape new to me, spend an evening at a house I have never entered before, stare at some scene in a play, and be haunted by the feeling that this is not the first time I have known this landscape, house, scene. All coincidence? That is what the scientists, the psychologists who think they are scientists, and the orthodox philosophers all tell us, and they ought to know. But I do not believe them,

and after all it is not their dreaming that is under discussion but mine.

The knowing men of the Nineteenth Century, who thought they lived in a kind of steam-engine universe, had many a gibe at the ancients, whether Egyptians, Hebrews, Babylonians, Greeks, for taking their dreams seriously, believing them to be symbolic and prophetic, and asking for them to be professionally interpreted. By this time, when the march of progress had well begun, only the poor and ignorant, the country lasses with their little "dream books" and the kitchenmaids who consulted the Gipsy Queen at the back door, bothered their heads about dreams. The scientist could not measure or weigh them, and they had no real place in his engine of a universe. The rational thinker dismissed these odd adventures of the night, which obviously did not belong to the sensible world. Only the common folk—and some of the poets—still persisted in the ancient tradition of believing that there was something not only odd but significant about their dreams, and still followed Pharoah in having them interpreted. I suspect too that in even the most severely rational period almost every kind of woman, whether openly or in secret, still felt that her dreams were important and not merely nonsensical inventions or jumbles of memory in the awakening brain, for woman is rarely tempted to live in a little box of abstractions and has an intuitive perception of the richness and complexity of things. And long

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

before I read the psycho-analysts, and long, long before I read Dunne's *Experiment With Time*, even as a child I felt that dreams were being dismissed too easily. I could not dismiss my own dreams like that. They left too deep an impression. It was as if these other people had never done any real dreaming themselves. With a certain air of pride, people would announce that they never remembered dreaming. To me it was as if they had announced proudly that they had never seen great mountains or the sea. They had, I felt, only half-lived. There was a whole world into which they had not entered. And it was not, I began to see, a tiny spectral world of fleeting terrors or vanities. Never from the first did dreams appear to me to be nothing but an idle fantasmagoria of my waking life. They were always more than that. Soon I felt that they were an accompaniment, in some other sphere, to my waking life, having much the same relation to it that the exquisite and tragic tunes for the piano have to the vocal parts in the songs of Hugo Wolf. But just as a Wolf song is the voice *and* the piano, so our real life is our waking hours plus our dreams, which are just as much experience as our daylight adventures. Then I began to suspect that in our dreaming there is a clue, and a clue not only to our inward nature but also to the enduring nature of life itself. At the very moment when we seem to lose the real world we are beginning to find it.

With the opening of our present era, when science



entered its last field of enquiry (for it cannot go any further after taking the mind itself as an object of investigation), the dream was brought out of the kitchen, for the psycho-analysts no longer saw it merely as "a meaningless conglomerate of memory-fragments left over from the happenings of the day," but as "the direct expression of unconscious psychic activity." (I quote from Jung, who seems to me the wisest of them.) The Gipsy Queen and her dream books were no longer seen at the back door, but now Dr. Freud and *his* dream books were conquering the drawing-room. The dream was important now because it was at once the creation and the revelation of the dreamer's Unconscious. It is true that the Unconscious was anything that the psychologist, who did not seem quite a scientist but rather a man who had temporarily moved into a scientist's rooms, chose to make it. And it was not quite the same in Zurich as it was in Vienna, and differed again either in Cambridge or Grenoble. Moreover, though the Unconscious apparently played the devil with the patient, it behaved itself perfectly with the doctor, who perhaps did not possess an Unconscious. It was difficult, it appeared, for us to reason decently and arrive at the truth simply because of the antics of the Unconscious and our foolish trick of "rationalising" what was fundamentally irrational, instinctive, and disreputable. The only human beings who were free from this universal weakness were the psycho-analysts them-

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

selves, who did not hesitate to write very long books indeed, filled with reasoning that if they had been like the rest of us would have been worth nothing. It is true that, in order to guard against possible weakness, frequently they had themselves psycho-analysed, but this only put the responsibility, so to speak, round the corner, and somewhere the miracle of reason appearing out of universal unreason had to happen.

With the more recent pronouncements about dreams by a psychological theorist as wise as Jung, nobody could quarrel. He says:

The view that dreams are merely imaginary fulfilments of suppressed wishes has long ago been superseded. It is certainly true that there are dreams which embody suppressed wishes and fears, but what is there which the dream cannot on occasion embody? Dreams may give expression to ineluctable truths, to philosophical pronouncements, illusions, wild fantasies, memories, plans, anticipations, irrational experiences, even telepathic visions, and heaven knows what besides. One thing we ought never to forget: almost the half of our lives is passed in a more or less unconscious state. The dream is specifically the utterance of the unconscious. We may call consciousness the daylight realm of the human psyche, and contrast it with the nocturnal realm of unconscious psychic activity which we apprehend as dreamlike fantasy.

It is certain that consciousness consists not only of wishes and fears, but of vastly more than these, and it is highly probable that this unconscious psyche contains a wealth of contents and living forms equal to or even greater than does consciousness, which is characterised by concentration, limitation and exclusion . . .

Here, I think, is an open road at last, instead of a *cul de sac*. This account of dreams does not contradict the experiences of us dreamers. Although it has a very different basis of theory, it does not even conflict with Dunne's view that in dreams our focus of attention becomes a four-dimensional focus confronted with four-dimensional presentations, which cannot be attended to as we attend to our waking three-dimensional presentations:

Throughout your dreams you endeavour to interpret the dream scenery as a succession of three-dimensional views similar to those you experience in field I. And always the excessive Time I length of your focus defeats you. Nothing stays fixed to be looked at. Everything is in a state of flux. For always your view comprises the just before and the just after of the instant of Time I sought for And, because of the continual breaking down of your attempts at maintaining a concentrated focus, the dream story develops in a series of disconnected

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

scenes. You start on a journey . . . and find yourself abruptly at the end . . .

This is, whether you accept or reject the time argument, a very plausible account of the typical dream effects, though I would not say—and I do not think that Dunne himself would say—that it explains all dreams, for some of them, as we shall see, are not of this kind at all. I like his point, too, that the reason why in the true dreams of unbroken sleep we are never dazzled, deafened, scorched, frozen or terribly fatigued is that in the absence of our usual three-dimensional focus, all the other foci of attention become less concentrated, just as they appear to do under the influence of certain drugs. Where Dunne is misleading—though this may be because he is merely anxious to illustrate the workings of his own theory—is in suggesting that dreams are all a reconstruction, bewildering because of their difficult time order, of our own experience. Some of them are obviously that, shaped and coloured by some deep emotional impulse, but others are no more than they are merely imaginary fulfilments of suppressed wishes.

In my own dreams, as I observed before, the obvious autobiographical element seems to be almost entirely absent. They contain no reflection of the day's anxieties. The worries or triumphs of authorship or dramatic production play the smallest possible part in

them. I rarely seem to encounter a person I know well in my waking life. I do not return to places I have known well. I do not seem concerned with my usual interests. I am aware, of course, that at least nine out of every ten of my dreams are forgotten at once, and that the ones I remember are the odd minority, but even so it might be expected that the dreams sufficiently impressive to be clearly remembered would be the very ones that most vividly reflected my waking life. But it is not so. (Of course I have had dreams that were not only autobiographical but uproarious wish-fulfilments. The best, and most bitter, I ever had was when I found myself seated at an enormously long table in a glorified version of my old home. On the table was everything I had ever liked to eat and drink, and round it were all the people I was fond of, miraculously gathered together, and never had there been such a supper party. Just as we were about to eat, I was shaken roughly—and I was aching with hunger and cold—I remember that my waterproof-sheet was frozen stiff as a board—and it was early morning stand-to, in a front-line trench near Neuve Chapelle in the winter of 1915. That was the cruellest dream I ever had.) And if much of what I see is so much dramatic symbolism, then the problem still remains, for why should I choose—if I have any choice—such unlikely symbols? For example, my waking self has only a tepid interest in animals, and I rarely go near a zoo. Yet in dreams I have seen

the most fantastic beasts. (An essay of mine called *The Berkshire Beasts* was a record, as faithful as I could make it, of a dream.) Only the other night I watched a dream procession of the most curious monsters, led by several creatures that had heads rather like dromedaries but much larger and also immense bow legs; and I felt no terror in the dream, only a pleasant curiosity. I very rarely have dreams that terrify me, though I have had a few nightmares. The last one was about twelve months ago, when I saw my own body, stretching at right angles from me, and it was a stiff flat shape, as if it had been cut out of three-ply wood. This might have been comic, but it wasn't, it was horrible and I woke up in a sweat of fear. Once, several years ago, I pulled myself clean out of a dream that threatened terror. I was underground in a long passage, rather like a gallery in a mine, and suddenly there was a distant sound and all the other men there, who knew about the place, ran as hard as they could in the direction away from the sound. I knew that something terrible was coming round the corner and I remember telling myself this and then saying: "But why should I stay and be frightened? It's a dream and I can pull myself out of it." And pull I did, and I can still remember the effort it was, for though I was soon out of that underground passage I seemed to be bound to its world by innumerable strands of elastic cord so that I had to strain and strain in the darkness to snap them all and free

myself. And for the first few moments afterwards it was not the escape I had had from the underground terror that left me exhausted, but this sense of straining in the dark.

But a great many of the dreams I remember—recollect when I awake but not necessarily store away in my memory—simply cannot be considered to be fantastic reshufflings of my own experience. They are not like my own experience, and they are not at all fantastic. Frequently they are much less fantastic than my own waking life, and are, in fact, often quite dull, though I do not ever remember being bored by them at the time. It may be that my alter ego wishes to discover what it is like travelling in wholesale silk in Exeter or organising a bridge drive in Skegness or going on a cruise to nowhere in particular with a ship-load of dreary strangers. But though I earn my living by my power of invention and so think handsomely of it, I cannot believe it created everything in these dreams, right down to the last detail of dull similitude. No, what some of these dreams suggest—and here I part company with all the analysts—are chapters chosen at random from other people's life stories. It is as if the wires of experience were crossed. Or that my consciousness, or some part of it, suddenly went flowing into the channel of somebody else's experience, thus making me live—or, rather, re-live—an episode or two from another autobiography. There is a consistency and realism about such dreams that

remove them from the pack of nonsense we invent ourselves. Now and again, with me, they leave the commonplace without losing this consistency and realism. One night last year I dreamed myself into some foreign city and though I had no name and did not know what I looked like, I *felt* I was a younger and smaller man, really somebody else, a student or something of that kind; and I crept into a room where there were a number of tiny models of some military or naval invention; and I had just taken one of these from the table when two uniformed officers rushed in, and as I was running out of the opposite doorway one of them fired several times at me, wounding me severely, and as I staggered out into the street I could feel my life ebbing away. I was actually wounded during the War but not in this fashion, and have never in waking existence felt my life fast ebbing away. But that moment in the dream had a terrible reality, and I do not believe I could invent that vast throbbing gush of weakness. No doubt most of the dream was my own invention, though I am not given to melodrama of this kind, but I will swear that that swaying progress from the office into the street and the blind weakness that washed over me there were somebody's last moments and that my consciousness had relived them. We may all have to relive a great deal before we have done, just as if we were the new needles dropped into the records, for ever revolving, of universal human experience.



Then there are dreams, or fragments of dreams, in which we do not merely seem to change identities with a fellow human being but leave common humanity altogether, say good-bye to anything resembling the daylight world, and catch a glimpse of some entirely new order of reality. We look down on landscapes beyond Sirius, and see creatures that died ages ago on the far face of the moon. But more than that, for these things, though remote in time and place, may still belong to our own order of reality and could be apprehended through the same five senses. Sometimes we feel as if for a brief moment the octave or two of vibration to which we respond had been enlarged to a whole vast keyboard. I remember once having nitrous oxide gas at the dentist's, and as I gulped and began to suffocate I was thinking about consciousness and self-consciousness, which were topical enough as subjects at that moment. Then I suddenly saw, felt, apperceived that the problem of self-consciousness was solved for me and with it the whole problem of the universe. My vision penetrated to the very heart of all things, and I cried out in ecstasy, *Eureka!* And it was no use my dentist pointing out that all was over, the bad teeth were gone, and all was well, for now all was not well, for I had wakened to a muddled little world, my triumphant ecstasy had vanished with my bad teeth, and it was as if for a moment I had heard the harmony of the spheres and had then lost it for ever. I muttered

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

something of this to the dentist, who grinned and said that his last patient had come out of the gas babbling about horse-racing. What then? If there are no race-horses concealed in the cylinder of gas, then neither is there the penetrating vision or the ultimate harmony. The vision does not come from the gas, but the gas, by blocking all access to ordinary reality, releases some part of the mind, which now looks further and fares better. There is no metaphysical ecstasy in nitrous oxide gas, the ecstasy is somewhere in me, buried deep, buried so damnably deep that I had to lose seven teeth finding it. Then, not very long ago, in one of those very broken dreams that seem nearer waking than sleep, just trembling beneath the eyelids, I saw a world of shapes, and though they were not obvious natural forms, neither were they out of any geometry that I knew. But what was really strange and exciting about these solids was that they gave the impression somehow of being alive. Not only was there some kind of mysterious pulsation about them, but successive bands of colour travelled not merely over their surfaces but, as it were, *through* them towards me. The effect was of life but of some higher and multi-dimensional order of life, no more to be fully comprehended by me than the organisation and performances of the Philharmonic Orchestra could be understood by a gnat.

Then, finally, there is a kind of dream that is very rare but has been known to men since history began.

That is the clear wise dream, which even a psychoanalyst, if he ever had such a dream, would have to consider far removed from ordinary dreams, for instead of a confused reflection of ordinary experience it seems to offer us a new and superior type of experience. When the wise old ancients in the desert said that God had appeared to them in a dream, undoubtedly this was the kind of dream they had had. Instead of the familiar confusion, there is a crystal clearness, and things are not out of focus but are more sharply observed than ever before. It is as if, returning to Dunne's theory, we were for once able to maintain a concentrated four-dimensional focus on four-dimensional presentation. Or, alternatively, that for a brief while we had been attached to a mind infinitely richer and greater than our own. And in these rare dreams there is not only delight but wisdom. Just before I last went to America, during the exhausting weeks when I was busy with my Time plays, I had such a dream, and I think it left a deeper impression upon my mind than any experience I had ever known before, awake or in dreams, and said more to me about this life than any book I have ever read. The setting of the dream was quite simple, and owed something to the fact that not long before my wife had visited the lighthouse here at St. Catherine's to do some bird-ringing. I dreamt I was standing at the top of a very high tower, alone, looking down upon myriads of birds all flying in one direction;

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

every kind of bird was there, all the birds in the world. It was a noble sight, this vast aerial river of birds. But now in some mysterious fashion the gear was changed, and time speeded up, so that I saw generations of birds, watched them break their shells, flutter into life, mate, weaken, falter, and die. Wings grew only to crumble; bodies were sleek and then, in a flash, bled and shrivelled; and death struck everywhere at every second. What was the use of all this blind struggle towards life, this eager trying of wings, this hurried mating, this flight and surge, all this gigantic meaningless biological effort? As I stared down, seeming to see every creature's ignoble little history almost at a glance, I felt sick at heart. It would be better if not one of them, if not one of us all, had been born, if the struggle ceased for ever. I stood on my tower, still alone, desperately unhappy. But now the gear was changed again and time went faster still, and it was rushing by at such a rate, that the birds could not show any movement, but were like an enormous plain sown with feathers. But along this plain, flickering through the bodies themselves, there now passed a sort of white flame, trembling, dancing, then hurrying on; and as soon as I saw it I knew that this white flame was life itself, the very quintessence of being; and then it came to me, in a rocket-burst of ecstasy, that nothing mattered, nothing could ever matter, because nothing else was real, but this quivering and hurrying lambency of

being. Birds, men, or creatures not yet shaped and coloured, all were of no account except so far as this flame of life travelled through them. It left nothing to mourn over behind it; what I had thought was tragedy was mere emptiness or a shadow show; for now all real feeling was caught and purified and danced on ecstatically with the white flame of life. I had never felt before such deep happiness as I knew at the end of my dream of the tower and the birds, and if I have not kept that happiness with me, as an inner atmosphere and a sanctuary for the heart, that is because I am a weak and foolish man who allows the mad world to come trampling in, destroying every green shoot of wisdom. Nevertheless, I have not been quite the same man since. A dream had come through the multitude of business.

## XVI

REMEMBER A QUOTATION FROM WHITEHEAD: "IT IS impossible to meditate on time and the creative passage of nature without an overwhelming emotion at the limitations of human intelligence." It has not been easy, during these past two years, to meditate at all. You can think about things in general on a battlefield, for I have done it. But not for long and not to much purpose. A burst of machine-gun fire scatters your thoughts, and then just as you are gathering them together again down comes the barrage, beating the earth with a ten-mile flail. It seems to have been not unlike that with me during these years. When I have done a bit of thinking it has been between spells of nervous anxious work in the Theatre, little but urgent political jobs of writing, speaking, organising, worries about the family health and fortunes, and of meetings, conferences, interviews, journeys, and melancholy sessions with the newspapers or the broadcast news. What a thoroughly vicious circle is here! We cannot get our values and our cosmology right because we can no longer think quietly and creatively; we can no longer think quietly and creatively because we now live in a world of alarms and crises; we now live in a world of alarms and crises because we have

thrown over any idea of universal trust and co-operation; we have thrown over any idea of universal trust and co-operation because we no longer hold beliefs that tend to unify us; and we no longer hold beliefs that tend to unify us because we cannot get our values and cosmology right. Let us admit the truth. A sense of responsibility drove me into taking on more work than I decently knew how to do, so that I have not been able to be quiet and meditate a little. But not that alone, and probably not that even primarily. An inner restlessness and growing despair urged me to say Yes when I ought to have said No. Possibly I wanted to be too busy to think. I may have taken on more and more jobs instead of more and stronger drink. Certainly the result was the same: I have thought hurriedly, excitedly, in brief snatches; going rapidly, much too rapidly, through solid books like M. F. Cleugh's *Time and its Importance to Modern Thought* (which has both meat and academic deadwood in it) when I ought to have been fast asleep; turning a page down here, making a hasty note there, then forgetting them all; perhaps giving voice too soon to half-formed ideas; so that although I know I have grown a little inside my head I have not much more to say than I had at the end of *Midnight On The Desert*.

But I am unrepentant about my notions of time. The conventional view of it still seems to me as absurdly narrow as it is unrewarding. People who say

that "the future is nothing" and that precognition and prediction do not exist, seem to me to be living in another world. Merely to label everything *coincidence* is to believe like a child and not like a scientist or a philosopher. What world is this, so crammed with fantastic coincidences? It may turn out in the end that there are no more coincidences outside the chemistry and physics laboratories than there are inside them. There was a pretty little example of double times during our stay in Florence. I had gone up to my wife's room after lunch, to see if she was ready to go out, and found her sleeping. I sat in an arm-chair near the bed to wait, and then began to doze. I saw her open her eyes, smile slowly, rub her eyes, yawn and stretch, and then sit up. I stared harder, and the room gave a little quiver, and then I was wide-awake and saw that she was still sleeping. Within a minute or so, however, she opened her eyes, smiled slowly, rubbed her eyes, yawned and stretched, and then sat up, just as I had seen her do in my tiny dream a few moments before. If anybody wishes to cry, "Coincidence!" I shall not be angry, for I realise that the movements of a person waking up are limited; but I can only say that at the time I was convinced that the order of the movements was exactly the same and that I certainly felt I had seen the same thing twice. I may have been deceiving myself, but the whole little episode came out of the blue and I had not been thinking about time problems. My own opinion is



that it happened just as I have told it and that the only explanation is that the secondary self, discovered in sleep when the primary self no longer concentrates on the narrow moment, has a wider *Now* than the ordinary waking self, there is more in its present, and so it could observe my wife coming out of her sleep. Note that this is not really seeing the future if you accept this division of selves. It is the secondary self seeing its present, some of which happens to be in the primary self's future. More than once I have been wakened by alarm clocks and telephone bells that had not then rung. I had heard them ringing in my sleep, or, in other words, my secondary self had heard them as part of his wide present; I had wakened, and then my primary self had had to wait anything from a moment or two to a minute or so before they rang for it too. These and similar effects are common enough, but on a nice, safe and sensible view of things they cannot be explained at all. You have to pretend they are not there. If that fails, you can still come out with "Coincidence!"

I have had so many letters giving examples of precognition and prediction that I do not propose to begin rummaging among them for the oddest instances. But during the last few weeks I have come across three tricks with time that seem to me unusually curious. The first was in an account of the hypnotic experiments conducted at Grenoble early in this century. A woman called Eugénie was hypnotised

and went back and back in memory, giving an account of various lives she had had. I had read of these experiments before, chiefly in the works of men who believed in re-incarnation. But now here was something new. The hypnotist, Colonel de Rochas or Dr. Bordier, now brought Eugénie's memory *forward* instead of taking it back. When she imagined herself two years older, she showed all the signs of expectant motherhood, then seemed as if she were drowning, but after ageing another two years once more conveyed the impression of pregnancy and, in reply to a question, said she was now "On the water." All this seemed so unlikely, so much mere wandering talk, that de Rochas brought her out of her hypnotic sleep. But, we are told, everything happened as she had predicted. She had a child by a lover, two years after this, then threw herself into the river but was rescued. Two years later still, she gave birth to another child on one of the bridges over the Yser, where she was suddenly taken ill, and she had been right when she had replied "On the water." Coincidence again? Or did she carefully arrange her future life—birth, attempted drowning, second birth on a bridge—to fulfil the predictions she made while hypnotised? It seems to me just as reasonable to suppose that her consciousness, released in some mysterious fashion by the hypnotism, travelled forward in time just as it had travelled back, that she had a kind of *future memory* that was then at her disposal.

Then there was the story, which I had at second-not first-hand, but which was solemnly vouched for and anyhow is too good not to be repeated, of the two men at Chartres. They were on holiday, it is true, and might have lunched well, but I was assured that they are both scientists of good repute and quite incapable of coming home with such a yarn after deliberately inventing it. And they are not time theorists either. They climbed the tower at Chartres and looked down into the square. There they saw two carelessly-dressed holidaying men crossing the square and then going to enter the cathedral. Each of the two on the tower noticed something very familiar about one of the men far below. "Why," cried A. to B. "that's you, down there." But B. was already announcing that he had seen A. down there. Each of them was certain that he had seen the other. It seemed as if the pair of them had just crossed the square again, although there they were, up in the tower. They dashed below, but saw nobody in or around the cathedral at all resembling themselves, and retired, baffled. (How lucky they were not to *meet* themselves, which would be a real horror!) If this is all nonsense, then we need not bother our heads about it; but if it happened as they say it happened, then there is only one sensible explanation, and that is that as they dreamily surveyed the square below, the primary self stopped concentrating on his succession of narrow little *nows*, and the secondary self

opened his much wider *now*, which included five minutes before when they actually were crossing the square. But, of course, there must be some difference between those crossings, and to that difference I will return later. Just as there must have been some difference in the evening paper placards that my friend saw a few days before his death and the placards that appeared just after his death. He was a theatrical producer, and going up Shaftesbury Avenue one evening with his wife, he said: "I must get an evening paper. Did you see that placard—*Well-known Theatrical Producer Dead*—wonder who it is?" They bought all the papers, but no producer had died that day, nor could they find any trace of the placard my friend said he had seen. But a few days later, there they were, on Shaftesbury Avenue, dozens of them—*Well-known Theatrical Producer Dead*, for that day my friend had collapsed in the middle of a rehearsal and had died very soon afterwards. If the story is not true, then let us say no more; but if it is, then some of our philosophies will have to be re-written, for they are describing one kind of life while we live in another.

Then I have the account of the man who saw, in a clear dream, time running backwards. He sent it to me a day or two ago. He had been approached by an elderly lady to try and help her to discover what had become of her grandson, who had been in disgrace and had been shipped across to Canada by his

parents. (This was before the War, in the days of "black sheep to the colonies.") In his clear dream, my correspondent "found himself standing between two mattresses on the floor of a large hall or shed. The room was full but these two mattresses had no occupants. As he stood there all activities in the shed stopped suddenly, as if by clockwork. This was followed by time moving backward, the impression being of a film running back on itself. All events in that place ran along backwards, the effect being grotesque in the extreme. A clock was noticed on the wall and the hands were slowly moving in the wrong direction. And so on. In this way the process continued for a long period, until a moment arrived or re-arrived when both the mattresses between which the dreamer was standing became occupied by two young men. Time continued to return upon itself for a certain period, and then with a click, time events stopped and almost at once began to unroll forward in the normal manner." The dreamer now heard the two young men making their plans and knew what became of them, and as one of them was the lost grandson, he was able to give the old lady information that was confirmed very soon afterwards by a letter from the young man himself. All this may be a delightful fiction, but I do not see why it should not be the truth. Taking into account the character of the writer and all the circumstances of this letter, I would bet money that he did actually see time run-

ning backwards. If you retort that he did this only in a dream, I reply that it was also only in a dream that he discovered what had happened to the lost grandson in Canada, and add to that a further observation, namely, that there are many dreams to which "only" must not be applied.

You will notice that all time-travellers, who find themselves with some freedom of movement along the fourth dimension, can observe but not interfere. (Although Dunne does grapple with this problem of interference, he makes it easier for himself elsewhere by always referring to us as *Observers*.) Once we escape from the narrow little *Now* we are really audience, and even if we should be on in the scene we are still audience. There is only one point at which we can interfere, as Dunne shows us, and that is at the *Now* point in what he calls Time One. But this interference, which must come from that part of the self not enmeshed in Time One, or—to use Dunne's term—some higher Observer, can change the future. Now this has always seemed to me the weakest part of Dunne's argument. (Though I boggle at the regress too, for an *infinity* of times turning into dimensions of space is unthinkable. I feel in my very bones that this is a complicated universe but not as crazily complicated as all that. Something has gone wrong here.) It is like saying that the future is there, all nicely shaped and coloured and ready to be put into the newspapers, diaries and history books, but neverthe-

less is not really there because it is being changed by our interference, madly re-shaped and re-coloured every moment or so. A future that is not nothing—and I am dead against that theory, for how can the future be nothing when lots of people have seen something?—but is a mass of stuff that is being chopped and changed about all the time cannot be said to be existing in exactly the same way that the past is existing. The past is fixed. Go back to the right place along the time track and the Saxons are losing the Battle of Hastings. Even if, as Ouspensky suggested, you could go back and start all over again, that would not alter the fact that in *one* past the Saxons lost the Battle of Hastings. But once allow any kind of interference, and clearly the future is in a different category. It is anything but fixed. That does not mean that it is nothing. It means that it is a realm of possibilities, some of which will be actualised. But this is not a mere matter of logic and words. These possibilities, which I fancy are more limited in number and scope than we would first imagine, exist in their own right. In their own sphere they are definite events. But when they are actualised they are, so to speak, brought from one world into another, or, in other words, are translated into material forms.

One thing had always puzzled me in Dunne's theory. I dream that I am affectionately thumping an elephant. Several years later, I go to India and

actually find myself affectionately thumping the elephant of my dream. Dunne would say that my dream was the result of that part of myself which he calls Observer Two rather dizzily surveying my length of Time One, which to him is spatial and not temporal, and noticing among other things this charming little scene with the elephant. Then my Observer One jogging steadily along his Time One would finally arrive at the elephant. (But which Observer is it, by the way, that is responsible for our feeling so creepy at such moments? It cannot be Observer One, for he has not seen the elephant before. Yet it ought not to be the higher Observers, just because they *have* seen the elephant before and have nothing to feel creepy about. This question is not frivolous, if only because it indicates the danger of this division into Observers whose mutual relations have not been worked out.) If the higher Observers did not approve of this elephant episode, they could, we are told, intervene so that the Time One track avoided the episode, the elephant and I thereupon missing each other by miles and days. Which means that I have had two futures already, one with and the other without an elephant. But I will not quarrel with that, for if you allow the division into separate selves, if you slice me into a series of Observers, then you can have both determinism and free-will, for it is then reasonable to say that a higher self or an Observer of more dimensions has some choice in matters that for the next lower



self or the Observer with one less dimension in his outlook appear to be determined. Thus, Dunne's Observer One in Time One exists—poor devil—in a world of determinism. But that is not the point. The question is—Is there any essential difference between the elephant I thumped in my dream, my Observer Two's elephant, and the beast I afterwards (in Time One) thump in India, my Observer One's elephant? If Dunne deals with this anywhere, then I seem to have missed his explanation. But to me the essential difference is that Observer Two's elephant is a reflection or image or idea of Observer One's elephant, which is the beast known to zoology or biology and the solid object known to chemistry and physics. They are really elephants in two very different worlds. Actualisation is the process of bringing the event into the world of matter. And the reason why we concentrate our attention to this narrow slit of *Now*, which can enlarge itself at once when we no longer need to attend to our immediate affairs, is, I fancy, that only by its aid can we manipulate anything in a material world. Our Time One, which seems completely irreversible to our waking mind, marches with the entropy of the universe, which appears to be one vast atomic explosion.

There seem to me, here and now as I turn out my mind as one turns out the contents of a bureau, the bills and receipts and letters and odd memoranda, two major mysteries in this mysterious life of ours.

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The first is this problem of actualisation, which, as I have suggested, is really the business of bringing events, which already have their being in what I believe to be the more enduring and fundamental world of our feeling, imagination and will, into the world of material form. It is as if our history had to be written among the atoms just as it has in our literate societies to be written in ink. I do not understand the relation between ourselves and what we call matter, assuming, of course, that matter is not the source of all possible energy, and that material existence is only collateral with other modes of being. Put it another way. Why do we say "only a dream"? If we regard a dream as a mere grotesque little shadow of experience, it is obvious why we say "only." But I for one, as I have shown, cannot accept that point of view. If a man's dreams should offer him a richness and complexity of experience that he does not know in waking life, he ought to put them first. But it is unlikely that he would, and still more unlikely that we should have anything but contempt for him if he did. Why? It is true that there is not in dreams the same exercise of determined volition, and that, rightly or wrongly, we feel that nearly always in dreams a man is easily manipulating his own private little interior world to his own satisfaction. (Though we must not forget that there is a deeper and more blinding terror in dreams than anywhere outside them.) It may be that it is this very privacy, this absence of com-

munication and co-operation, that we feel to be wrong, although we cannot prove that dreams are really solitary, nor would it be easy to prove, even if dreams were known to be entirely private to the dreamer, that the sum total of individual, rich and rewarding experience by night was inferior, as a sign of man's quality, to the total of shared and communicated experience by day. And it is a fact that we are just as likely to feel our loneliness and separateness even among our friends in daylight as we are when we are wandering at night among the hills and pastures of dreams. The sudden removal of this feeling of loneliness and separation, which can let in ecstasy, may come at any time, awake or dreaming. No, there is behind all this a deep conviction that no matter how high we set the invisible world, how enduring we believe it to be, we must strive towards this actualisation, this material clothing of the immaterial forms of the imagination, this record of our feeling and will among the atoms. That is why, I think, we are never completely convinced, though we may be fascinated, by those Eastern doctrines that offer a short cut into the blue. We feel it has not to be done that way. Though all, we are told, is for spirit, it seems to us that here brain, working out its own illusoriness, has counter-checked spirit. Why our rune should be shaped among the atoms is a mystery, but it seems to be one of the essential mysteries, part of the darkness out of which

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

our being emerges and towards which it appears to move.

The second major mystery, I feel now, is concerned with the self and the soul, with individuality and personality. The modern Christians make much of personality. They have never converted me. Nor can I believe, as they should believe, for they have not denied this part of their doctrine, that with every body there comes into existence an immortal soul, which may have begun last Tuesday but will outlast the stars. It is more reasonable, as many good thinkers have pointed out, to suppose that an immortal soul existed before birth. It is also more reasonable to believe that the soul has not been arbitrarily linked in this life with a set of physical and mental characteristics, but has deliberately acquired them, for purposes of its own. It is also extremely reasonable to hold that the outward Jones is but a sign and symbol of the temporary condition of the everlasting Jones, that the figure a man cuts amongst us is like a suit of clothes carefully chosen by his soul to express itself outwardly. Thus, it seems to me that if you lay the stress on personality and believe in the individual soul, then you must go much further than orthodox Christianity does and plump for re-incarnation and Karma and a sort of training-school cosmology. These can supply answers to most of our most puzzling questions, which orthodox Christianity cannot do; and there is a rather surprising weight of philosophical

opinion on this side. Even T. H. Huxley admitted it was a "plausible vindication of the ways of the Cosmos to man." I have myself always been attracted by its inherent reasonableness, which I could not discover in the vague cosmology of our own churches, but on the other hand, it never really struck home to me, never chimed with my own deepest experience. And this, without taking from reason its due, is the real test. The cosmos you discover in moments of profound feeling is the genuine one. Ecstasy follows the sudden unveiling of truth.

Now it is obvious from my dream of the birds that my own mind has been groping in the opposite direction. I am coming to see that personality is not only not one of the supreme realities, but that on any cosmological scale of thinking it is nothing but an illusion. The outward Jones is the most Jonesy thing about him. This does not really conflict with what I said about Jones in *Midnight On The Desert*:

If Time is illusory, or multiple, our mode of apprehending a dimension of things that we cannot grasp spatially, then there is nothing absurd or contradictory about Jones's immortality. The question "Which Jones?" can now be answered. The answer is, Jones, the whole Jones, the Jones of the cradle, the schoolroom, the office, the mansion, the nursing home, the complete fourth-dimensional length of Jones. . . .

except that, following Dunne (though I notice some modification of his previous theory of increasingly differentiated individuality in his last book *The New Immortality*), I assumed that what was important was this going on, along the fifth dimension, of this four-dimensional Jones. (Note that I still believe in the existence of this four-dimensional Jones.) What is wrong is the suggestion of a steady growth, a thickening and colouring of individuality. Now I feel that the more inward you go, the less Jones is mere Jones, and the more he is also Smith, Brown, Robinson and much else besides. (Which is what I tried to convey, not at all successfully, in my play *Music At Night*.) Jones as a body among bodies, or if you like as an appearance among appearances, is perfect: there he is, good old Jones. But he himself in those worlds behind the appearances cannot find Jones, but only a series of Jones, each of which dissolves into something else. There are moments of which you can say, as I could of my vision of life in the dream of the birds: "I was most wonderfully stirred" or "I was in ecstasy." But really you produce the personal pronoun to give the feeling a time-and-place reference, for you do not really feel there was any "I" but only "stirred" or "ecstasy." In black misery you certainly feel a solid little lump of ego, but the further you move away from misery the more the self seems to thin out, turning from a sort of thick egoistic substance into a large fragile vessel.

There is a delightful sensation that visits me now and again, and has done ever since I can remember, and I have always called it "the æsthetic feeling." Somebody will say "France" or "wild horses" or "Rome" or "Eighteenth Century", a country, a creature, a place, a period, a type of landscape, a kind of art, almost anything that has a richness of life in it, and immediately I am lost in a little vision of France or wild horses or Rome or whatever it might be, and feel happier than if somebody had just given me ten thousand pounds. There is no obvious reminiscence in these sensations, though they must be based on experience of some kind; and I am not thinking how it looked and felt to me, but rather—or so it seems at the actual moment—how it looks and feels to itself, how it really is. Hinton once pointed out how the four-dimensional view necessitated, if only for sheer geometrical reasons, the "casting out of self", for his tessatact to be seen as such at all could not be observed, as people so often say, "from your own angle." And there is a suggestion about these sensations of mine, which do not arrive every five minutes, but can light up half a day when they do come, that in their selfless enjoyment of the object they reproduce this four-dimensional outlook. Obviously, too, they have some connection with that mysterious multi-dimensioned faculty, the imagination. And they arise from that borderland between my tiny headland of a personal mind and the vast

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

continent of impersonal mind or consciousness. If this has a bleak look, after the glitter of Paradise and its angels, remember that the very sign of any contact with that impersonal mind or consciousness is a feeling of clear delight or ecstasy.

Much of what I am coming to believe, though there are some sharp differences, has been argued and stated with more dialectical cunning than I possess by Gerald Heard in his *The Third Morality*. I go and find it again, not having read it for some time; and the right pages open as if by magic:

The provisional picture or plan with which we are left and on which we must act is, then, neither a scheme of things controlled by "a magnified non-natural man" who created it and will judge the achievements of his creatures, and yet whose own behaviour seems arbitrary and vague, nor yet a scheme which has no control, but is simply a blind system, an aimless machine, which certainly behaves comprehensibly, regularly, definitely enough, but which means nothing and is going nowhere. The first fact we have to face is that mind is the best notion we can have of the cosmos. . . . If, then, mind is the source and sustenance of things, our consciousness, instead of being an irrelevant by-product of the body's action, is *sui generis*, an irreducible, ultimate reality. But if that quality of mind, which is the basis of the universe, only



approximates to our minds when they are at their highest, then though our consciousness is ultimate and irreducible it certainly is not so in its present condition and aspect. At its best it is now no more than a very rudimentary form. Further, if it is ever to rise to any higher conception of the true nature of its mentality and the true mentality of nature, it must concentrate on its highest activity of pure interest and universal affection. . . . This deduction from the outer universe (that we now have to think of a new conception of reality, orderly, but not mechanical, conscious, but not personal, following laws, but laws of thought, not of matter) is confirmed by our exploration of the inner universe; the depths of consciousness reached through the back of our own mind. . . .

And with all this I would agree. He seems to me right, too, in claiming as evidence for this universal impersonal consciousness the fact that at the deeper levels of our own consciousness we are less aware of ourselves as individuals. Yet this is not because at such levels we are less aware of everything, for it is also a fact that there our knowledge widens and our powers increase. Any stupid child, under deep hypnosis, is a wizard. Sometimes the ordinary limitations imposed on our conscious minds by time and space seem almost to disappear. As I remarked earlier, various women in France, some years ago,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

were given deep hypnosis, and were then influenced to travel back in memory to the beginning of their lives, then back and back to other lives, which they recounted in quite different voices and manners from their own. Here, it seemed, was good evidence for successive incarnations; and indeed if you accept personality as final and see it as the sign of the individual immortal soul, you must regard these recitals, which could not possibly have been faked, as proofs of re-incarnation. But I would take them as proof that what we call personality is a vehicle or one small focal point of this universal consciousness, or at least of what we may call a world mind, which may itself be but a focal point of a universal consciousness. Under the hypnosis, a bit of it was sent wandering through one channel of life-story after another, like a gramophone-needle dropped into one record after another. Such life-stories remain like four-dimensional novels or dramas, waiting to be re-experienced by consciousness. But there is no individual soul imprisoned in them, any more than the Philharmonic Orchestra is embedded in one of its gramophone records.

I remembered then how, only three days ago, we had been motoring through a market town on the North Downs and there had suddenly returned to my memory the figure of an old wool-buyer I had known as a boy in Bradford. I had thought of him because he used to come to this very market town to look at the wool. It was at least five-and-twenty years since I

had set eyes on him, years and years since I had given him the tiniest thought; we were only acquaintances, not friends; but I had liked the old chap, and now he came back to me, so that I could see the shine on his slightly bulbous nose, catch the glitter of his silver-rimmed spectacles, hear his rather hoarse, flat Bradford voice, watch him fussing again with his samples, bending down awkwardly and short-sightedly to mark the tickets on them—there was the old chap to the life. He had once hurried in and out of the Wool Exchange in Market Street, Bradford, and had come down to this country town, with his pipe and his umbrella and his careful expense account; and now neither place knew him, nor any other haunt of men. Where was he then? Was his soul marching on? Or was he a bit of chemistry that had bubbled in the test-tube for the appointed time and then resolved back again into the original dead elements? No, no, no. And then in a flash—and I had not been thinking about these things, but had been considering other matters, and it seemed a leap of pure intuition, but it was as certain as it was as quick as lightning—I saw, I *knew*, that what I thought of as old So-and-so was simply a multi-dimensional track, which, if the universal consciousness swept through it again, would show the old fellow marking his samples and lighting his pipe again, just as before. In the same way, if the time had slowed up again in that dream of the birds, the flame of life, at which I stared with such ecstasy,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

would have halted and have seemed to flicker out, but some of the little feathered bodies would have been seen fluttering their wings, mating, flying towards their death once more. But that I had seen already, and it had made me deeply unhappy. Whereas the sight of that rushing white flame had nearly burst my heart with joy. And as it was with the birds in my dream, so it would be with men, if I had the strength and courage to dream it. There would be millions and millions of them, and some I would have known and loved; but again it would not matter, for the white flame, trembling, dancing, then hurrying through them, was all knowledge and all love. . . .

## XVII

AND SO IT IS EVENING, AND VERY SOON THEY WILL ring the bell up here, a sharp urgent little bell that is even more peremptory than the telephone, to tell me that dinner is nearly ready. I have sat so long and smoked so much that I ought to have a foul tongue and a headache, but I have neither, and can eat a dinner, though I cannot escape the feeling that I have not earned it. The rain has stopped and somewhere at the other side of the house there may be now the beginnings of a watery sunset. Here it is all a green and vague pulpiness; you feel you could take the hills between your hands and wring green water out of them. The rooks, which probably followed Tennyson on to this island, are restless and raucous. With water here and mist there, the fields have nearly gone. Away beyond the tall elms, Godshill has clean vanished, perhaps for good, having had enough of our time. So; come away. Nothing, I imagine, has been nicely settled for me since this morning. The nations have not decided to disarm and to spend a little of the money they would save on theatres for experimental dramatists. The English have not risen from their sleep, and are not now hurling their coronets and ermine capes into the Thames. A popular author,

## A FURTHER CHAPTER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

who considers himself not quite as good as most of his readers think he is, but a damned sight better than the remainder imagine, is not now, by some distant wizardry, in a far easier situation than he thought himself to be in this morning. The plays that the rich and fashionable would not have in London and that nobody but friends of the family would have in New York, these plays have not won some magical success during the afternoon. All is, I have no doubt, exactly as it was when I came up here this morning. I still cannot make up my mind whether I am a fortunate man who feels unlucky, or a lucky man who feels unfortunate; but I still feel one of them, and therefore not very happy and vaguely contemptible. And to-morrow I must get to work again, though at what, and why, I am not very sure. Perhaps I will write a thoroughly egotistical book that will end by proving that the self is not real. And mean it too. And though nothing outwardly has changed, and not so much inside, somehow I feel as if to-day I have been a long way and now come back home again, and so I feel better than I did this morning. Not a lot better, thanks; but distinctly a little better. . . .

FINIS









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